

# ASSESSING THE STATE OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES IN THE U.S.

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“There is an inner revolution taking place in our culture in which great numbers of people are becoming aware of the relationship of their inner lives to their outer lives.”

- Rob Lehman, 1999

## I. Introduction

*A Powerful Silence: The Role of Meditation and Other Contemplative Practices In American Life and Work*, published by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (Duerr, 2004), summarized the findings of a qualitative research project called “The Contemplative Net,” sponsored by the Center from 2001 to 2004. This project was, to our knowledge, the first systematic effort to map the use of contemplative practices across a diverse group of secular settings including business, healthcare, education, law, social change, and prison work. In-depth interviews were conducted with 84 professionals who incorporated contemplative practices in their work. The data was then analyzed for recurring patterns and themes.

The report confirmed the growing use of contemplative practice in non-religious settings and that it was a phenomenon worthy of further study. Findings included:

- The use of contemplative practices in professional settings is on the rise.
- At the time *A Powerful Silence* was written, at least 135 companies, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies offered their employees classes in some form of meditation and/or yoga. The number of hospitals and medical clinics that provided Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction training for patients had increased from 80 in 1993 to 250 in 2003.
- Individuals who regularly meditate or have other contemplative practices reported a difference in the quality of their work experiences and personal relationships.

- In addition to well-documented stress reduction benefits, interviewees described how contemplative practices helped to increase self-awareness and served as a vehicle for forgiveness and reconciliation. They reported a renewed sense of commitment to their work, improved workplace communication, and an increased ability to deal with organizational challenges. In addition, they spoke of how these practices enhanced their personal relationships with family, friends, co-workers, and significant others.
- The emergence of a new organizational paradigm: the “Contemplative Organization”
- Thirty-eight of the 84 interviewees (32%), many of them in leadership and/or managerial positions, described bringing contemplative practices into their workplace with the intention of creating a more reflective environment. Analysis of these interviews revealed a new organizational paradigm, one that uses contemplative awareness as an organizing principle for the workplace. In these companies and organizations, meditation and other practices are not simply add-on benefits but are incorporated into the structure of daily work and decision-making processes (Duerr, 2004).

Since *A Powerful Silence* was published, the use and integration of these practices in non-religious sectors has continued to grow. The purpose of this paper is to review the developments in this field over the last five years and to consider their implications.

For the purposes of the Contemplative Net project as well as for this paper, contemplative practices are defined as practices that quiet the mind in order to cultivate a personal capacity for deep concentration and insight. Examples include sitting in silence but also many forms of single-minded concentration including meditation, contemplative prayer, mindful walking, focused experiences in nature, yoga and other physical or artistic practices. Various kinds of ritual and ceremony designed to create sacred space and increase insight and awareness are also considered forms of contemplative practice.

In this framework, contemplative practices are distinct from more active forms of prayer (such as petitionary prayer), though not mutually exclusive. Active prayer and faith-based approaches tend to reinforce pre-existing religious, spiritual, and psychological beliefs. Contemplative practices, in contrast, emphasize direct experience and cultivate receptivity and openness.

## II. What's Happened Since 2004?

### A. Polls and Surveys on Contemplative Practices, 2005 - 2010

In the past five years, a number of polls and surveys have explored the role of religion and spirituality (including contemplative practices) in American life. Viewed collectively, the data from these studies indicates that the use of contemplative practices such as meditation and yoga continues to increase.

#### General population

- The 2007 Pew Religious Landscape Survey found that “four-in-ten adults (39%) [say] they meditate at least once a week, compared with three-quarters of Americans who say they pray at least once a week. But meditation is a regular practice among most Buddhists (61% meditate at least once a week) and is also practiced on a weekly basis by majorities of Jehovah’s Witnesses (72%), Mormons (56%) and members of historically black churches (55%).” (Pew, 2007)
- Among younger people, the Pew Survey found that “One-quarter of adults under 30 say they meditate on a weekly basis (26%), compared with more than four-in-ten adults 30 and older (43%). These patterns hold true across a variety of religious groups.” (Pew, 2007)
- “The number of Americans who practice yoga at least twice a week jumped 133 percent, to 3 million this year [2006] from 1.3 million in 2001, according to a survey conducted by Mediamark Research.” (Moran, 2006)

#### Health Care

- Among U.S. adults, the use of deep breathing exercises, meditation, and yoga for health purposes increased between 2002 and 2007. (Barnes, Bloom, & Nahin, 2007, p. 4)
- “A 2007 national Government survey that asked about CAM [complementary and alternative medicine] use in a sample of 23,393 U.S. adults found that 9.4 percent of respondents (representing more than 20 million people) had used meditation in the past 12 months—compared

with 7.6 percent of respondents (representing more than 15 million people) in a similar survey conducted in 2002. The 2007 survey also asked about CAM use in a sample of 9,417 children; 1 percent (representing 725,000 children) had used meditation in the past 12 months.” (National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine website)

- The Garrison Institute’s Initiative on Transforming Trauma (ITT) is currently conducting a mapping survey of the field of contemplative trauma care, led by Garrison Institute Senior Fellow Deborah Rozelle, Psy.D. and University of Michigan researcher Anthony King, Ph.D.

## **B. Cultural Observations**

In addition to data from the above research, I suggest that there are some cultural markers to indicate this “movement” of applying contemplative practices in non-religious contexts is approaching a tipping point:

### **1. Mainstream media coverage of contemplative practices**

Stories about the benefits of meditation and other practices are no longer published primarily in specialty publications, but appear with increasing frequency in venues such as *USA Today*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*.

The 2010 PBS documentary “The Buddha” also played an important role in introducing many Americans to meditation, as well as its applications to fields such as health care, death and dying, law, and more. The film was viewed on its first PBS screening by 1.6 million people across the country. The show’s companion website, which provided resources for learning to meditate, had more than 1.6 million hits by mid-April, 2010, and its Facebook page had 31,642 fans.

Media outlets that have traditionally focused on contemplative practices have also seen growth. For example, subscriptions to *Shambhala Sun* magazine grew 56% from 2004 to 2009. The March 2010 special issue called *A Guide to Mindful Living* was the bestselling issue in the magazine’s entire history (Boyce, 2010).

### **2. Election of President Obama**

Setting aside political affiliations, the election of President Obama in 2008 is one of the most interesting indicators that the American public has a strong

yearning for a more contemplative way of being (albeit perhaps on an unconscious level). Mr. Obama embodies a number of qualities that are developed with contemplative practice: reflection, thoughtfulness, equanimity, and an emphasis on collaboration and interconnection. When he searched for his first Supreme Court nominee, for example, he looked for a “candidate with empathy.” In a time when Americans seem to be becoming more polarized, Mr. Obama’s ability to respect points of view different than his own and to hold multiple truths—also dimensions of a contemplative perspective—is refreshing to many people.

### **3. Institutional strength**

A number of institutions devoted to the study and application of contemplative practices have been established in the past five years, including the Mindfulness Awareness Research Center (based at UCLA), the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education, and the Center for the Investigation of Healthy Minds. Institutions that existed prior to 2005 have grown and extended the reach of their work, such as the Mind & Life Institute, the Center for Mindfulness Medicine, Health Care, and Society, the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, and the Garrison Institute.

Collectively, the events and publications being put forth by these institutions are reaching a critical mass that is raising public awareness of the benefits of contemplative practices. See Table A on the following page for a list of selected key events from the past decade.

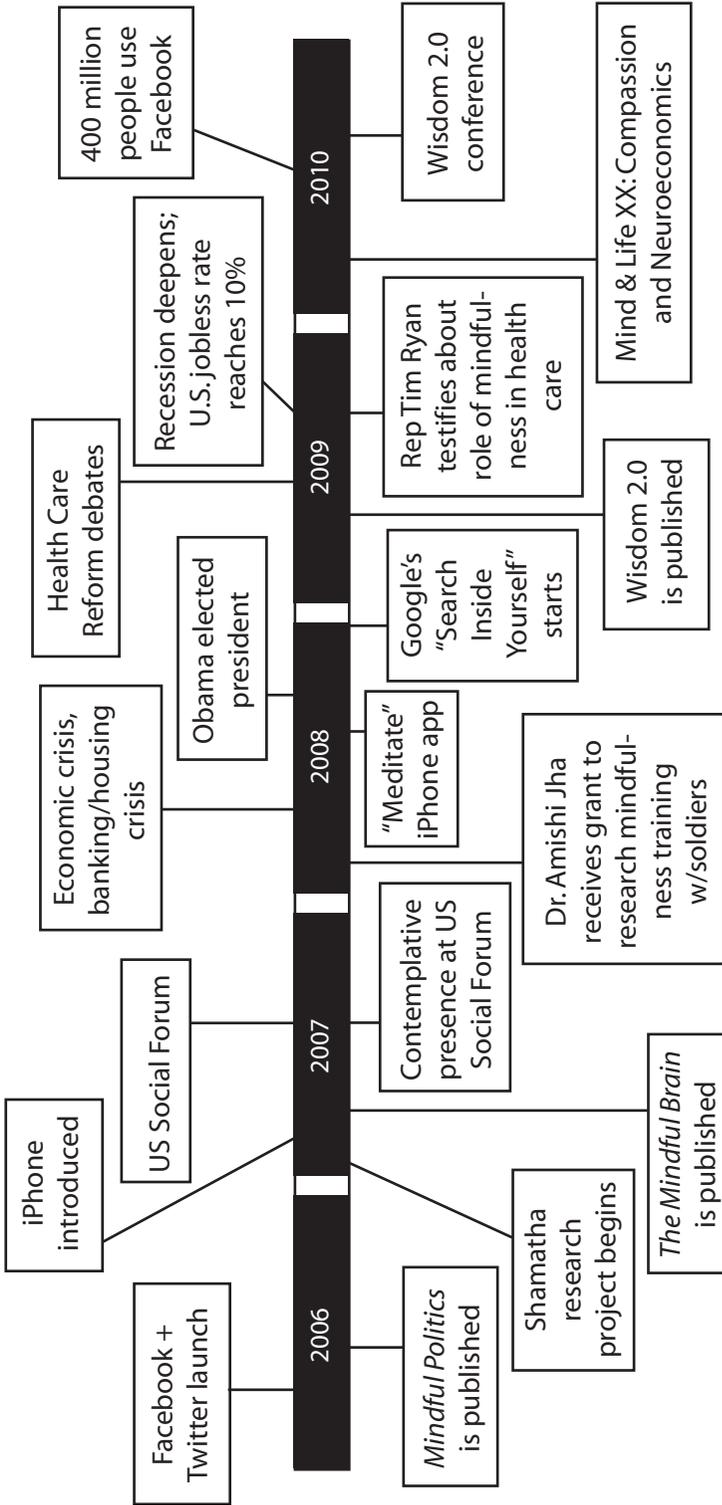
### **4. New generation of contemplative leaders**

Compared to five years ago, there are more people in leadership positions with contemplative backgrounds, and they are no longer primarily spiritual teachers. These leaders are making their own unique contributions to the contemplative process and its dissemination. Two examples in the world of technology are Meng Tan and Greg Pass. Both are engineers who are also students of meditation; they have applied their skills to design tools and structures that can support reflection and insight. (For more on this, see the Technology section below.)

### **5. Contemplative responses to current events**

Table B (on the following pages) presents a timeline that juxtaposes some of the major socio-political-historical events of the last decade with some of the key events in the “contemplative movement.”

TABLE A  
 Selected Key Events in the “Contemplative Movement”  
 2000 – 2010



It would appear that we are becoming more skilled in creating relevant contemplative responses to contemporary situations—for example, a program of mindfulness retreats for military veterans and their families was developed in response to the many vets who returned home suffering from PTSD. And, compared to previous years, these responses are garnering more press coverage and public attention.

## 2000

- The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society organizes two retreats for Yale Law School faculty and students.

## 2001

- *Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression: A New Approach to Preventing Relapse*, by Zindel Segal et al, is published
- Mindfulness in Education Network (MiEN) starts

## 2002

- UC Davis Center for Mind and Brain established
- “Law and Contemplative Awareness: An Exploratory Gathering” held at the Fetzer Institute

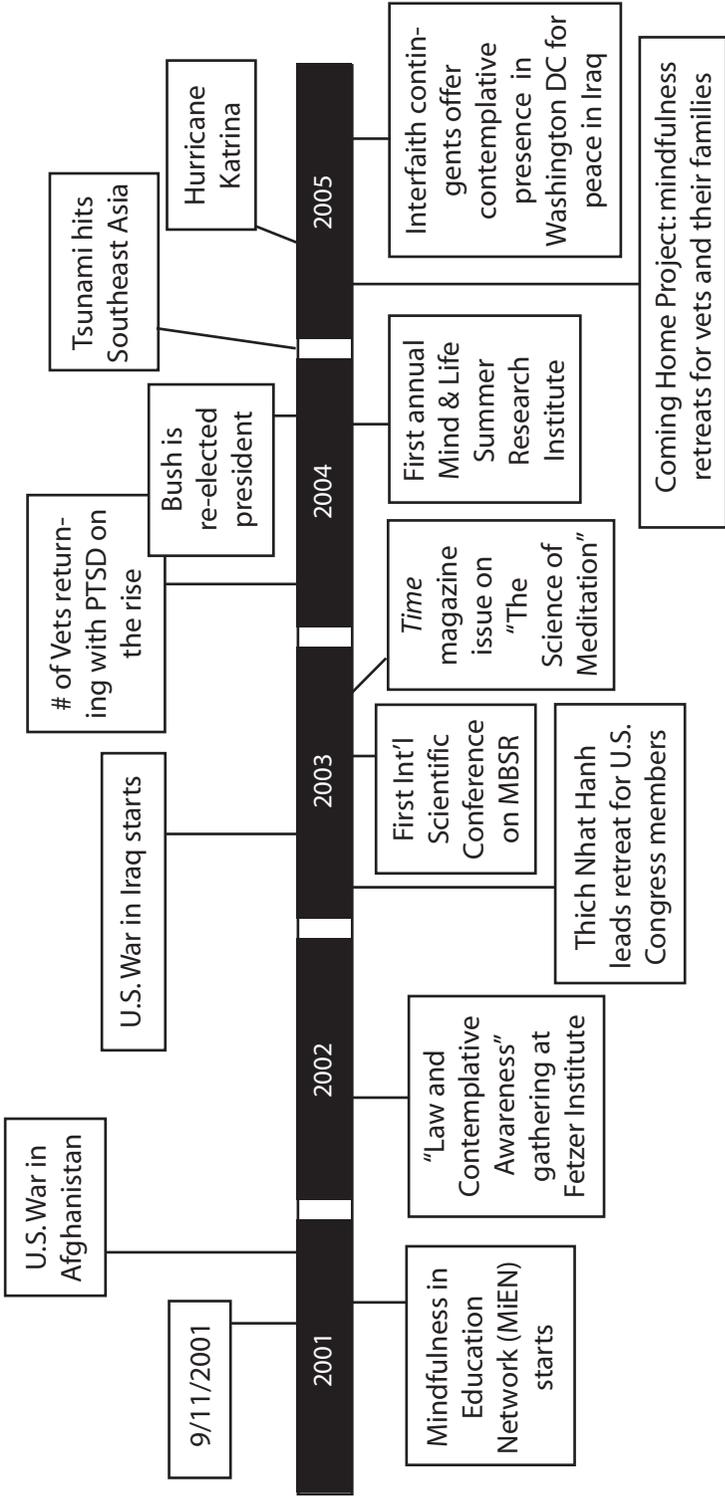
## 2003

- Thich Nhat Hanh leads a retreat for U.S. Congress members
- First annual International Scientific Conference on MBSR
- *Time* magazine publishes entire issue on “The Science of Meditation”
- “Inviting the World to Transform: Building a Community of Change,” gathering for social activists organized by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society
- “Survey of Transformative and Spiritual Dimension of Higher Education” completed by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, for the Fetzer Institute

## 2004

- First Annual Mind & Life Summer Research Institute
- Mind & Life awards first round of grants for the Francisco J. Varela Research Award

TABLE B: Timelines  
Key Socio-Political Events and the "Contemplative Movement"



- Publication of *A Powerful Silence* by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

## 2005

- Coming Home Project begins; provides mindfulness retreats for military vets and families
- Publication of the Garrison Institute's *Contemplation and Education: Current Status of Programs Using Contemplative Techniques in K – 12 Educational Settings: A Mapping Report*
- Mind & Life XIII: The Science and Clinical Applications of Meditation
- Mindfulness Awareness Research Center (MARC) at UCLA is launched
- Interfaith religious contingents offer a contemplative presence at a Day of Action at the White House to call for peace in Iraq
- *Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society*, by Peter M. Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers, is published
- “Transforming the Culture of Organizing: A Gathering for Emerging Leaders,” held at the Garrison Institute

## 2006

- Mind and Life Education Research Network (MLERN) starts
- *Mindful Politics, A Buddhist Guide to Making the World a Better Place*, edited by Melvin McLeod, is published
- *Radical Amazement: Contemplative Lessons from Black Holes, Supernovas, And Other Wonders of the Universe*, by Judy Cannato, is published

## 2007

- Shamatha Project launches—the most comprehensive attempt to scientifically study the effects of meditation
- The Stone House starts in Mebane, NC; retreat center dedicated to spiritual activism

- Contemplative presence at US Social Forum, organized by stone circles and others
- Mindfulness, Courage, and Reflection for Educators program launched by Center for Mindfulness
- Buddhist monks march in Myanmar/Burma in a mass nonviolent protest for human rights
- *The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Culture of Well Being*, by Dr. Daniel Siegel, is published
- *Making Waves and Riding the Currents: Activism and the Practice of Wisdom*, by Charles Halpern, is published

## 2008

- First “Zen Brain” event at Upaya Zen Center, bringing together neuroscientists and Buddhist teachers in a retreat for the general public
- Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE) at Stanford launches
- Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE) starts
- **“Meditate,” a meditation timer iPhone app, is released**
- Google’s “Search Inside Yourself Program” starts

## 2009

- Mind & Life XIX meeting: Educating World Citizens for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
- “The Contemplative Heart of Higher Education” conference, organized by ACMHE
- Symposium on Contemplative Practices for Army Care Providers held in Washington, DC
- Rep. Tim Ryan (D-OH) testifies in U.S. Congress about the role of mindfulness practices in health care, as part of Health Care Reform debates
- *Wisdom 2.0: Ancient Secrets for the Creative and Constantly Connected*, by Soren Gordhamer, is published
- *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness*, by Deborah Schoeberlein and Suki Sheth, is published
- Soren Gordhamer starts regular blog on mindfulness and technology for *Huffington Post*

- Barry Boyce’s “Mindful Society” column begins in *Shambhala Sun* magazine

## 2010

- “The Buddha” documentary airs on PBS, with companion website
- Mind & Life XX meeting: Altruism and Compassion in Neuroeconomic Systems held in Zurich, Switzerland
- Wisdom 2.0 conference on the mindful use of technology held in Silicon Valley

## C. The Use of Contemplative Practices by Sector

The 2004 *Powerful Silence* report covered five sectors: Business, Medicine/Science, Education, Law, and Prison Work. In a paper of this brief length we are not able to cover all the developments in these areas, but a review of key events over the past five years shows that two sectors from the original report are of particular significance: Medicine/Science and Education. And we see the emergence of contemplative practices applied in two new sectors: Technology and the Military.

### 1. Medicine/Science

The proliferation of scientific research on contemplative practices (particularly meditation and mindfulness) is one of the most remarkable trends of the past five years.

As recently as 2007, a report commissioned by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) found that, “...firm conclusions on the effects of meditation practices in healthcare cannot be drawn based on the available evidence...It is imperative that future studies on meditation practices be more rigorous in design, execution, and analysis, and in the reporting of the results” (Opsina et al., 2007, p. 210).

However, a number of high caliber research designs have been carried out more recently by university-based, well-respected scientists such as Dr. Clifford Saron (UC Davis), Dr. Richard Davidson (University of Wisconsin/Madison), and Dr. Amishi Jha (University of Pennsylvania). The Shamatha Project is of special note. Based at the University of California Davis, it is the largest and most comprehensive attempt to study changes brought about by meditation.

Overall, the number of studies on contemplative practices has increased

dramatically during this time period (see Table C). The quality of these studies, larger sample sizes, and more comprehensive findings are dramatically raising the profile and utility of this research. Combined with previous findings from research on MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction), this wealth of data is creating legitimacy for contemplative practices, and is providing people in leadership positions with excellent data to justify the application of these practices, not only in health care but in other fields as well.

Two of the most important institutions dedicated to the scientific study of contemplative practices and health care marked significant milestones in these past five years.

The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society (also known as CFM, and founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn) celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009. In the 24 years from 1979 to 2003, 13,000 people completed MBSR courses. In the five years from 2003 to 2008, an additional 5,000 people completed MBSR courses. As of May 2001, 563 MBSR practitioners are listed in the CFM directory. MBSR continues to have a prominent presence in health care, but also now in business, education, prisons.

The Mind & Life Institute, which held its first meeting between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and scientists in 1987, experienced a decade of phenomenal growth. Mind & Life annual meetings on topics such as “The Science and Clinical Applications of Meditation” (2005) have gained increasing notice in the media and among the general public. In 2003, the Institute launched the Mind and Life Summer Research Institute (MLSRI), and has held the MLSRI annually since then. More than 200 graduate students, post docs, junior and senior faculty, contemplatives and philosophers have attended each of the MLSRIs, with attendance at the 2009 meeting topping 300. Along with the Varela Research Awards, the MLSRI has become a powerful catalyst for developing the emerging field of Contemplative Neuroscience and Clinical Science.

**Table C: PubMed Search of Published Studies Related to Selected Contemplative Practices**

<b>Category/Intervention</b>	<b>Years</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>
<i>All articles</i>		
Mindfulness meditation	2000 - 2004	69
Mindfulness meditation	2005 - 2009	252
MBSR (Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction)	2000 - 2004	44
MBSR	2005 - 2009	122
<i>Clinical Trials</i>		
Mindfulness meditation	2000 – 2004	12
Mindfulness meditation	2005 – 2009	72
MBSR	2000 – 2004	11
MBSR	2005 – 2009	35

And finally, two closely related memes have emerged in popular culture during the last few years: neuroplasticity and mental fitness. The concept of neuroplasticity is becoming part of the common parlance now, receiving coverage in mainstream media such as *The Wall Street Journal* (Begley, 2004) and *The New York Times* (Holt, 2005; Aamodt and Wang, 2007). From 2000 to 2004, three articles in the *New York Times* referenced neuroplasticity; from 2005 to 2009, the *Times* published 12 articles on the topic. In December 2007, PBS aired a documentary titled “Brain Fitness Program and Neuroplasticity.” The Canadian Broadcasting Centre aired *The Brain that Changes Itself* in January 2009, based on the best-selling book of the same title by Dr. Norman Doidge (2007). The work of Drs. Richard Davidson and Antoine Lutz has been especially instrumental in demonstrating the relationship between meditation and neuroplasticity.

## 2. Education

Seismic shifts are happening in the integration of contemplative practices at both K–12 and higher education over the past five years. Naropa University (founded in 1974) and the California Institute of Integral Studies (founded in 1980) helped to pioneer contemplative education; then institutions like the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society and others built on that foundation. Several research studies have helped in recognizing this phenomenon and documenting the individuals and organizations that have played a role in it:

- “The Survey of Transformative and Spiritual Dimensions of Higher Education” (Duerr, Zajonc, and Dana, 2003), funded by the Fetzer Institute, documented academic programs and other initiatives in North American universities and colleges that incorporated transformative and spiritual elements of learning, including contemplative practices.
- A mapping survey conducted by the Garrison Institute (2005) identified 33 K–12 schools and educational institutions that incorporated a contemplative approach into their pedagogy.
- UCLA’s Spirituality in Higher Education Survey, conducted from 2003 – 2010, found that students show the greatest degree of growth in five spiritual qualities if they actively engaged in self-reflection, contemplation, or meditation. The survey also found that these kinds of practices have uniformly positive effects on traditional college outcomes. The study included interviews and focus groups with 14,527 students attending 136 colleges and universities nationwide.

The Mindfulness in Education Network (MiEN), which began in 2001 as an informal group of educators who were students of Buddhist teacher Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh, has grown into a more formal organization and has hosted annual national conferences since 2008. MiEN has been instrumental in building relationships between teachers, parents, students, and others who are interested in the integration of mindfulness in education.

A landmark national conference on “Contemplative Practices in Education: Making Peace in Ourselves and in the World,” held at Teachers College, Columbia University, in February of 2005, may have been the first event to

put this framework on the national map. Other major events in recent years have included:

- “Mindfulness as a Foundation for Teaching & Learning: A Conference for Educators, Counselors and Administrators,” organized by MiEN (2008)
- Mind & Life XIX meeting: “Educating World Citizens for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” featuring His Holiness the Dalai Lama (2009)
- “The Contemplative Heart of Higher Education,” organized by ACMHE (2009)

In 2006, *the Teachers Record* (published by Columbia University), regarded as one of the leading publications in educational research and scholarship, devoted an entire issue to the theme of “Contemplative Practices and Education,” with articles by Robert Thurman, Arthur Zajonc, Steven Rockefeller, and Mirabai Bush, among others. A research paper by Shapiro, Brown, and Astin (2008) helped to link neuroscientific findings on meditation with potential benefits in education.

A number of organizations and networks dedicated to the intersection of contemplative practices and education have emerged over the past five years. These include:

- Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE)
- Association for Mindfulness in Education
- Between Four Eyes
- The Hawn Foundation
- The Impact Foundation
- The Initiative on Contemplation and Education (the Garrison Institute)
- The Inner Kids Foundation

Other organizations that place a high value on contemplative practices as part of a vision for transformative learning for both students and teachers include the Academy for the Love of Learning, Passage Works, HeartMath, ChildSpirit Institute, and the Center for Courage and Renewal.

Thanks in large part to the work of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society’s Academic Program and its Contemplative Fellowships, “contemplative knowing” is now seen as a serious complement to critical thinking in

the field of higher education. There are initiatives and academic institutes dedicated to contemplative studies at Brown University, City University of New York, and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, to name a few examples.

### **3. Military**

Global violence and U.S. military action has been the backdrop for much of the past decade, starting with the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and progressing to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the unbounded “war on terrorism.”

The financial, physical, and emotional costs of combat have been high. A study from the U.S. Army Surgeon General’s office estimated that 15% to 20% of all soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan show signs of depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Zoroya, 2008). *The Huffington Post* reported that the suicide rate among 18- to 29-year-old men who’ve left the military went up 26% from 2005 to 2007, according to the Veterans Affairs Department (Hefling, 2010). Caregivers for these soldiers and their families are also experiencing deleterious effects (Duerr, 2009).

In this climate, contemplative practices are emerging as an effective intervention. In 2005, Zen Buddhist teacher Joseph Bobrow started the “Coming Home Project” to offer mindfulness retreats and counseling services to returning veterans and their families. Yoga classes offered at Walter Reed Army Medical Center helped soldiers find some reprieve from PTSD symptoms (Rivers, 2008).

A number of research and treatment projects utilizing meditation and other contemplative practices has been commissioned and funded by the U.S. Army. Some of these include:

- Chaplain (MAJ) Robert Williams began working with the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society on the “Military Care Providers Project” in 2008. In 2009, the U.S. Army and the Center co-organized a symposium in Washington, DC, that brought together military personnel and contemplative teachers (including Norman Fischer, Mirabai Bush, and Sharon Salzberg) to discuss how to deliver mindfulness to Army chaplains, medics, and other care providers. Retreat participants will be measured for increases in attention and compassion by the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at Stanford University.

- The Army's RESPECT-Mil program incorporates meditation, tai chi, qi gong, and other modalities to address physical symptoms and PTSD, according to Brigadier General Loree K. Sutton, M.D., who is the highest ranking psychiatrist in the U.S. Army and director of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury (Steele, 2010).
- In 2009, principal investigator Dr. Amishi Jha, of the University of Pennsylvania, and Elizabeth Stanley, Professor at the Walsh School of Foreign Service and Dept. of Government at Georgetown, received \$2 million from the Department of Defense to determine whether mindfulness training could help soldiers going into combat to stay focused and make good decisions. Findings from the pilot study show improvements in mood and working memory (University of Pennsylvania, 2010). The study is now training 240 soldiers at Schofield Barracks Training and Research Center on Neurobehavioral Growth.

Engagement with military institutions raises interesting ethical questions for contemplative practitioners about the nature of peace, war, and practice. There is no easy answer to these questions, but it's clear that a high level of physical and emotional suffering are present in this sector, and the need for skillful interventions will be ongoing for years to come.

#### **4. Technology**

According to the 2004 Pew Internet and American Life Project, 64% of online Americans use the Internet for faith-related reasons—nearly 82 million people. (Hoover, Clark, and Rainie, 2004). This appears to be the most recent demographic research on the use of the Internet and religion/spirituality, but we can surmise that this number has increased in the last five years.

During this same period of time, we have become increasingly dependent on technology to interface with many daily tasks (the iPhone is a case in point), and many of us have been part of the meteoric rise of social networking in the form of applications like Facebook and Twitter.

The emergence of a contemplative perspective in the technology sector has been percolating in the last few years. It has taken the form of tech tools that have the potential to support contemplative practices, such as the “Meditate” and yoga applications for the iPhone and on-line audio and video meditation

sessions, as well as a larger conversations on the topic. As meditation teacher and writer Soren Gordhamer puts it, “The great challenge of our age is not only to live connected to one another through technology, but to do so in ways that are beneficial to our own well-being, effective in our work, and useful to the world” (Wisdom 2.0 website).

Leading executives and engineers in several high profile Silicon Valley companies who have studied meditation are now bringing this perspective into their work. Greg Pass, the Chief Technology Officer of Twitter, is a longtime student of meditation and leads a weekly qi gong class for employees. Bradley Horowitz, the Vice President of Product Management at Google, has practiced meditation for 25 years.

Perhaps most famous of all is Meng Tan, an early employee of Google who worked as a software engineer at the company and is now head of Google University’s School of Personal Growth, where he oversees the mindfulness-based program called “Search Inside Yourself.” Meng originally thought of offering MBSR to Google employees, but found that no one registered for the course. Then he began to work with Mirabai Bush, Norman Fischer, and Daniel Goleman to develop a curriculum on “Mindfulness Based Emotional Intelligence” which launched in 2009. One hundred and forty employees signed up right away. There have also been lectures by a number of well-known Buddhist teachers, including Sharon Salzberg, Lama Surya Das, Matthieu Ricard, and Jon Kabat-Zinn.

The basic practices in the course are mindfulness, lovingkindness, and compassion, but, as Meng said, “We also intended for it to be an effective Emotional Intelligence curriculum for adults (perhaps the first of its kind in the world) that can be applied in the workplace and that is helpful both to increasing businesses profits and to people achieving more success in their careers.”

In April 2010, Soren Gordhamer organized the “Wisdom 2.0” conference, the first large-scale event to bring together two previously disparate topics: technology and mindfulness. The two-day event, held at the Computer History Museum near San Jose, CA, drew more than 300 people and featured business and technology leaders such as Tony Hsieh (CEO of Zappos), Meng Tan, and Greg Pass, as well as contemplative teachers such as Roshi Joan Halifax. There are plans to hold the event again in 2011.

At a Wisdom 2.0 talk on the aesthetics of Twitter, Greg Pass described Twitter as an invitation to experience a moment in time more deeply, to give “extraordinary attention” to something in our lives that might otherwise

pass us by. Of course not everyone will use Twitter in this manner, but the fact that a leading engineer has the aspiration for it to be used in this way is remarkable.

Although there is often a tendency to view technology as an obstruction to a mindful life, Roshi Joan Halifax reminded the audience that it has a great capacity to connect us, to give us new modes of expression, and to mobilize us to act from compassion. However, technology can also lead to dissociation and isolation if not used with mindfulness.

### **III. What Will Nurture The Growth and Development of a Contemplative Movement in America?**

Is there really a “Contemplative Movement”? In a traditional social or political movement, people typically have some awareness that they are part of that movement and make strategic (or not-so-strategic) choices in order to advance its cause. In this case, even though there is a spontaneous emergence of contemplative practices and values across diverse fields, it is likely that many of the people and institutions involved wouldn’t identify themselves as part of a larger whole. Sociologist Paul Ray’s theory about “Cultural Creatives” (2000) might be a useful analogy here:

While Cultural Creatives are a subculture, they lack one critical ingredient in their lives: awareness of themselves as a whole people. We call them the Cultural Creatives precisely because they are already creating a new culture. If they could see how promising this creativity is for all of us, if they could know how large their numbers are, many things might follow. These optimistic, altruistic millions might be willing to speak more frankly in public settings and act more directly in shaping a new way of life for our time and the time ahead... When we discovered the great promise of this new group, we set out to hold up a mirror for them, so they could see themselves fully. (Cultural Creatives website)

As in the case of Cultural Creatives, by naming this phenomenon we are helping people to become aware of it, perhaps thereby facilitating the next steps in its evolution.

The data and anecdotal evidence from these past five years suggests that contemplative practices are being used by more people and they are finding

a normative place in American life. But are contemplative values actually being internalized or is this a more superficial level of adoption? What are the indicators that these values are being internalized?

I would suggest that we are not just looking for an increase in the numbers of people who meditate, but rather for indications that the qualities nurtured by contemplative practices are taking deeper root and supporting a cultural shift. What would a society based on contemplative values look like? Some of the elements of it might include (Bush, 2010):

- Awareness of our inescapable mutual interdependence and its implications for the politics of a global society;
- Fulfillment of basic human needs and human rights for all
- Business with a bottom line that is no longer exclusively power and profit but one that promotes ethically, spiritually, compassionate, and ecologically responsible human life
- A medical profession committed to healing, wholeness, and compassionate decision making
- A justice system that encourages a lawyer to have compassion for his adversary while still being a zealous advocate for his client
- An economics that looks carefully at the relation between consumption and the pursuit of happiness.

In the process of working toward this deeper level of integration, some of the challenges we need to be aware of include:

- The American propensity toward consumerism; the tendency to turn everything into a commodity, and to look for an “easy fix.”
- Fear and misunderstanding of what contemplative practices are; suspicion that someone is trying to “take away” one’s religious beliefs or convert one to another religion.
- Our own tendency to be evangelistic about these practices. (The case of a 2003 “anti-stress” ballot measure in Denver, CO, is instructive. The initiative would have required the city to implement communitywide steps such as mass meditation sessions, piping soothing music into public buildings, and serving natural foods in school cafeterias.

The measure was soundly defeated and was the object of much ridicule.)

Here are four suggestions for addressing these challenges and for taking this nascent movement forward to the next stage of evolution:

### 1. Start with the end in mind.

This may seem counterintuitive, but it may help to focus on our end goal, on our biggest vision, rather than the specific means to get there. We can consider shifting the framework from encouraging the use of contemplative practices and instead emphasize a vision of a society based on contemplative values, which offers people many avenues for participation. The Charter for Compassion, sponsored by the Fetzer Institute, is an excellent example of this.

Again, the election of President Obama may be seen as an indication that many people are hungry for a kinder, gentler, and more respectful society. How can we use this strong desire to inspire people? Paul Gorman, former director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, suggested that, “The values and qualities that we love so much about Obama need to be named and more broadly owned.” As Gorman defines it, the challenge for us is to identify and claim these values in our own lives rather than project them onto a person or an organization.

Related to this, it will be important to recognize that people have diverse ways of cultivating these qualities, some of which may look like “traditional” contemplative practices and others of which will help to define new kinds of practices. Here, we need to “walk our talk” and be ready to let go of fixed ideas and be receptive to new iterations of contemplative practice.

### 2. Design for depth.

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society’s Academic Program (established in 1997) provides a good case study on how to make a systemic impact.

Arthur Zajonc, the program’s director, said, “In higher education, it’s clear to me that there is a longing for a deepening of the spiritual dimension. But people don’t know what that looks like. I think this is where the Center [has provided] leadership. We’ve said, ‘Here are the design principles of contemplative pedagogy, of contemplative inquiry.’ These are terms we invented, and now I am hearing them everywhere. You begin to articulate in a public

language toward which people are reaching but for which they don't yet have a clear vision. Where they have a longing, you have an idea and a practice that allows that idea to come to realization.”

According to Zajonc, three elements have contributed to the success of the Academic Program: persistence, focus, and people. He noted, “If you just drop in and do one or two years of work [in a sector] and then leave, you're not likely to build anything of sustaining value... You need to be able to provide support, services, networking opportunities. This takes time to build, over 10 or 20 years, to build a coherent movement.”

The Center's Academic Program has created a wide-range of activities that serve this constituency including: conferences on both regional and national levels, summer sessions on curriculum development, academic fellowships, an e-newsletter, monthly webinars, publications, practice retreats, and a professional membership-based organization (the Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education). The program has also worked in partnership with well-respected educational organizations such as the American Council of Learned Societies, an effective strategy for establishing legitimacy with more traditional institutions.

The result has been a growing number of academic institutions that are embracing the idea of contemplative education and supporting their faculty in this endeavor. Because of the Center's long-term commitment to this goal and diversity of strategies to meet it, the concept of contemplative education is now deeply rooted in higher education.

### 3. Build bridges.

Another finding from the original Contemplative Net study was the importance of “meeting people where they are.” In other words, it is essential to find the appropriate language and format for presenting contemplative practices, and to be willing to creatively adapt one's teaching goals and style in the service of the context. This has enabled these practices to be successfully introduced to a diverse group of people, from grade school students to corporate executives to incarcerated men and women. Google's Meng Tan has been extremely successful at doing this. When asked if he was introducing Buddhism into corporate life, Meng said, “I'm not interested in bringing Buddhism to Google. I am interested in helping people at Google find the key to happiness.”

The 2009 Symposium on Contemplative Practices for Army Care Providers brought together members of two different cultures: the military and the

contemplative. The dialogue that transpired was very informative about how to begin building bridges between two cultures. Both groups agreed that it was crucial that mindfulness trainers understand the world view and language of the military participants. For example, military culture places a high value on being a “Warrior” and the language often emphasizes strength. In contrast, contemplative teachers frequently present practices like meditation in the context of “opening up to pain” and accepting the condition of things “just as they are.” The potential for resistance and misunderstanding is high if we do not take these differences into account and plan for them. As Norman Fischer noted, contemplative practice is not value-neutral. We need to be aware and respectful of the differences in our backgrounds in order to effectively work together.

Perhaps one of the most pressing needs in the U.S. today is the capacity to heal the deep divisions that have built up over time (and have been manipulated for political gain) between people with different religious and political beliefs, and across economic classes and ethnic groups. There is a great need for facilitators who can bring together a room full of people on “both” or all sides of an issues and help people to be heard, to feel heard, and to stay connected across differences. These skills can be developed and supported through the use of contemplative practices. One interesting funding area to consider would be a project to support a cadre of facilitators with a contemplative perspective who can work in “hot spots,” e.g., the immigration issue in Arizona, the health care debates around the United States.

In such situations, a great deal of intention and effort is required to understand each other’s point of view and to truly respect differences. But the payoff can be great. By being willing to cross borders, as it were, to work with people we might not normally imagine as contemplative practitioners, we may realize a whole new dimension of contemplative practice and stretch our own boundaries in the process.

#### 4. Make the linkages more apparent.

Continue to organize meetings like this June 2010 Fetzer gathering that bring together people from diverse sectors so there is more awareness of how contemplative practices and values are being applied, and opportunities for creative collaborations. Some of the most interesting developments in this “movement” have come at the intersection of two or more sectors, such as when Rep. Tim Ryan spoke to the U.S. Congress about the role that mindfulness practice could play in health care in 2009. This represented a contemplative presence in politics, health care, and science, simultaneously.

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