

CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE AND PSYCHOTHERAPY

SUMMER, 1999

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Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in June, 8:30 a.m. – 11:20 a.m., in room 1229 in the Bayou building, at UHCL.

FOCUS: The goal of this course is to explore meditative and contemplative tradition in various cultures and spiritual traditions, and study the ways in which contemplative practice can contribute to psychotherapy, both indirectly through the meditative practice of the therapist, and directly through application in the therapy proper.

Texts: Mark Epstein: thoughts without a thinker
Thich Naht Hanh: Peace is Every Step
John Welwood: Awakening the Heart
Stephen Wolinsky: Trances People Live

Additional tapes and articles will be provided by the instructor.

Class will include meditation, then “working out of the silence.” There will be presentations and discussion and experiential exercises. Personal work is a possibility, so that we can experience the impact of working in a settled space. Experiential components, in addition to meditation, will include exercises in meditation (holding the pain) and meditation supported therapy (working/listening out of the silence), family sculpting, body scan, and sacred dance.

The class will be organized partially around the interests and traditions of class members. Each person will be encouraged to choose and practice a daily meditation practice at home. Individual reading, projects or research will be conducted then shared with the class. Class participants are encouraged to complete a brief meditation retreat during June if possible. We will also keep journals of personal experiences and learning. (The last 15 minutes of class was devoted to journaling.)

Attendance is important. Grading will be based on attendance, participation, and individual projects. Students set their own goals for the course and determine their own grade.

There were nine students in the class, young family therapy and counseling students, experienced therapists, and spiritual directors. One student from Japan.

A significant amount of class time focused on sharing and discussing students' experiences in meditation and experiences in daily life which seemed affected by their meditation practice. Likewise readings were discussed in a way to focus more concretely on therapeutic and personal experiences of the instructor and students.

Presentations by the instructor focused on her own journey, meditation, effects of meditation, using meditation in therapy, indirectly via mind of therapist and more directly through finding and encouraging awareness of patient's own transcendent experiences and/or practices, asking clients to meditate before the session, meditating together at the start of the session, etc.

There were two invited speakers for the class:

Micki Fine, who has studied with Jon Kabat-Zinn and is teaching mindfulness based stress reduction now in Houston. She talked about her work with various groups.

Mike Luedde, a family therapist, minister, spiritual director. Mike's topic was the similarities and differences, boundaries, overlap – between therapy and spiritual direction.

Experiential exercises included:

Meditation (beginning of each class)

Body Scan (Kabat-Zinn)

Yoga

Holding the pain (developed by L. Bell): based in Thich Nhat Hanh analogy from Peace is Every Step

Listening from the center (developed by L. Bell)..listening, acknowledging, non-verbally, holding questions in the mind only...then reflecting on the experience from viewpoints of "therapist" and "client"

Family Sculpture (from family therapy)..learning about the depth of experience when working therapeutically out of the silence.

Dancing (folk, circle) dancing as spiritual a contemplative exercise

Chanting, presented by class member

Projects by students included:

Learning Transcendental Meditation and reviewing research out of that traditions
Interviewing several meditating therapists in Houston, from different tradition,
and doing a qualitative analysis of their responses

Pulling together prints made by the student, poems and journal entries related to
them; presenting these to the class.

Studying Native American chanting; presenting that to class.

Participating in a personal retreat – Vipassana or Centering Prayer

Looking at how meditation is used in hospice work

Studying Jack Kornfield's work and tapes with a focus on how meditation can
empower therapy

Using Simply Soul-Stirring (Francis Dorff) to guide journaling

Developing a contemplative prayer retreat for a church group

Readings, in addition to texts, were numerous. Copies of articles from a variety of
spiritual, clinical, and research sources were summarized or handed out. However,
the primary focus was not on covering a certain amount of material, but on the
process of the class, the discussion and the experiential exercises. The class was
seen as a beginning, or as a part of an ongoing life process. Some examples of
readings are attached.

Selected Readings taken from references at end of 1st article below: Bell, L. G. Start with Meditation

Bell, L. G. (1998). Start with Meditation, In T. Nelson and T. Tepper (Eds.), 101 More Interventions in Family Therapy, 52-56. New York: Haworth.

Bell, Linda G. (1995/97) Meditation Supported Therapy, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. Tapes available from The Resource Link (1-800-241-7785). 1995 is a two-hour presentation; 1996 is a one-day institute. Tapes of one-day institutes given at Texas Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, in 1995, '96, and '97, are available from Egami A/V, 6052 Hillglen Dr., Watauga, Tx 76148, (817) 577-2564.

Carrington, Patricia. (1986). Meditation as an access to altered states of consciousness. In Wolman, B. and M. Ullman, Eds. Handbook of States of Consciousness. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold. Reviews meditation techniques and research on their effects.

Dossey, Larry. (1991). Meaning and Medicine. New York: Bantam. Summarizes medical research into the effect of prayer on healing. If you believe, on the basis of careful research, that prayer helps patients, are you obliged to pray?

Epstein, Mark. (1995) thoughts without a thinker, New York: Basic Books. Summarizes buddist teaching, buddist psychology, and psychotherapy. Compares buddist psychology and Western (psychoanalytic) approaches, showing how the two complement each other and can be used together to support both healing and health.

Hanh, Thich Nhat. (1991). Peace is Every Step. New York: Bantam paperback, 1992. Thich Nhat Hanh is a Zen Buddhist monk who was deeply involved in peace and reconciliation work in Vietnam during the war, and with veterans and survivors on both sides after the war. He teaches meditation as a way to mindfulness (being fully awake and aware).

James, William. (1902). The Varieties of Religious Experience. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co. (Mentor paperback, 1958). William James was the leading psychologist--philosopher of his day. His chapter on mysticism could have been written yesterday. He gives many examples of mystical experience from various religious traditions.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. (1990). Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness. New York: Delta. Overview of Kabat-Zinn's Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. (1994). Wherever You Go There You Are. New York: Halcion. At the back of this book is information about ordering several helpful mediation and yoga tapes.

Kramer, Sheldon Z. (1995). Transforming the Inner and Outer Family. New York: Haworth. Seeking to bring spirituality into the center of psychotherapeutic work, Kramer presents theory and practice using meditation, guided meditation, and guided imagery with individuals, couples,

and families. The book builds on the work of Virginia Satir and includes transcripts of interviews with her about her life and work.

Rosenthal, Joseph (1990). The meditative therapist, The Family Therapy Networker, 14, 38 - 41 (continuing pp 70-71). Beautifully combines explanation and personal experience.

Wolinsky, Stephen (1992). Trances People Live. Connecticut: Bramble. This book, by a teacher of Ericksonian hypnosis and family therapy is very readable. Wolinsky presets complex ideas clearly. He describes our daily "normal" life experience as a trance. The goal, through meditation and personal development, is to achieve a "no trance" state.