

MINDFULNESS

Integral Health and Healing

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The healing and transformative effects on society of large numbers of people purposefully cultivating a more mindful and contemplative life have potentially as much impact, if not more, than technological advances in power and connectivity and the capabilities they give rise to.

An inner “technology,” of which meditation in its most generic sense and most basic form (mindfulness) is the cardinal element, has the capacity to elevate our consciousness up to and beyond the challenges posed by our technological advances.

Meditative pathways, teachers, and programs cannot be cloned, although effective models might be adapted and modified, as has been the case, for example, in medical and educational settings with mindfulness-based stress reduction.

Such work would be well served by establishing a small number of centers for the in-depth training of a new breed of inventive and creative meditation teachers. Such centers could also conduct research and offer programs of various kinds, depending on their contexts and missions.

Individuals who have received adequate training in such centers, and others who appear spontaneously, might then establish second-generation centers from which programs, scholarship, and diverse applications of the contemplative perspective to the lives of real people would emanate and spread further. Ideally, these centers would be located for the most part within existing mainstream institutions such as universities, hospitals, clinics, medical schools, retirement and nursing homes (a very large and growing, receptive and in-need portion of our population), primary and secondary schools, college campuses, work environments (particularly large corporations and factories), prisons, shelters, and churches of all denominations that are receptive to this message.

Many models and natural resources already exist. Examples are programs that emphasize the value of relaxation and of the mind-body connection, such as the natural-childbirth movement, physical-education and health programs in the schools, the parenting movement, the death-and-dying movement including hospice work, sports at all levels including world-class amateur and professional athletics, corporate stress-reduction programs, Alcoholics Anonymous and other spiritually

based 12-step self-help programs, and in the medical arena, cardiac rehabilitation, occupational rehabilitation, physical therapy, and university health services, to name a few.

Schools of nursing and schools of social work already have such an orientation to a large degree, and constitute a very rich environment for further development and mainstreaming of contemplative practices. “Holistic education centers” such as Omega, Interface, The Open Center, Esalen, Holyhock, and The Learning Annex could serve as complementary, less mainstream venues and vehicles for the contemplative vision and its practices to spread, in arts and music as well as in other areas. They are already playing a key role in this regard in the society, as are more traditional and tradition-specific meditation centers across North America, such as Zen centers, vipassana centers, Tibetan Buddhist centers, yoga centers, ashrams, and classes, Christian retreat centers, and adult education centers.

These efforts will need to be complemented by well-conceived and well-funded research programs to evaluate various forms, approaches, environments, and short- and long-term outcomes of such efforts with specific populations of people.

To make integral “the contemplative mind in society,” efforts should aim at embodying the principles we espouse in our personal and professional lives, and for implementing the “Tao of work” within our efforts. By intentionally cultivating these “inner technologies,” we develop the capacity of the human mind for individual and collective creativity and wisdom and healing.

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