

This has been a great experience for me. The class has opened my mind to new fascinating concepts, allowing me to have an outlet for thought organization, and relaxation. The class certainly wasn't what I expected. Before I started the course, I was under the impression that I was simply going to learn stress reduction techniques. I couldn't have been more off. The class has taught me many beneficial practices that bring awareness to my present life. The techniques learned in the classroom setting have helped me relax and re-center my thoughts allowing me to be calm in day to day activities.

One of the first exercises that we learned in MBSR was how to perform a body scan. According to an article that appeared in Tricycle a Buddhist review by Kabat-Zinn, Monk, and Bass (2002) the body scan is a variation of the traditional Burmese practices of performing a body sweep. The article describes tuning into our senses and performing awareness to our body as if a horizontal band was moved up and down our body. Like how a CT scanner functions. This exercise was quickly incorporated into my MBSR practice. Kabat-Zinn, Monk, and Bass (2002) describe the body scan as a "Meditative practice not a relaxation technique. Relaxation is done with a goal in mind. Meditation is about non-striving and emptiness" (p.35) One must approach meditation with the understanding that meditation is not a tool to fix issues. It doesn't work, or not work, it just is. This was a difficult concept to grasp. We think that meditation should somehow make us do something or somehow fix our issues.

There were several new words that I was able to add to my vocabulary such as, non-striving, beginner's mind, and acknowledging. Striving was a term used to describe thinking that MBSR could solve all problems. Admittedly toward the beginning of the semester I was doing just that. I quickly realized that I was the definition of striving. During the first couple of sessions I was hoping that my MBSR practices would rid my mind of stress and I would be

completely relaxed. While the practices and techniques did help me relax the stress problems did not magically go away. After identifying this misconception, I was able to gain a new respect for the practice of mindfulness. Moving forward thru the semester keeping the beginner's mind and non-striving vocabulary at the forefront of my thoughts during practice I started to have some advances in MBSR.

There were several days when I had personal issues going on at home and it was enjoyable to go to class and refocus my thoughts allowing me a mental vacation from these issues at home. Thru breathing exercises, I was able to sort my thoughts and work thru some issues I was having. After utilizing these meditation practices the problems most certainly did not go away but they instead became more tolerable, and I had a plan of action to correct these issues. As Kabat-Zinn (2013) teaches in his book *Full Catastrophe Living* recognizing a feeling and attaching a label to it allows us to understand where that feeling is coming from and how we are going to choose to react to it. Using these techniques, I understood that I was having an issue that was making me angry and jealous. Once I labeled these feelings as such I was able to decrease the stress caused by these stressors.

Halliwell (2016) expresses this concept of striving flawlessly in his article that appeared in *Mindful* magazine "the biggest changes come from letting go of our goals, struggles, and hopes for a cure. At a certain point, focusing our mindfulness practice too much on stress reduction—or any goal—can limit its benefit to us. Real change comes from learning to make a different relationship with our stresses and difficulties."

On the last day of class, we were asked to sum up our experience in MBSR in one word. To me the only word that can encompass this course is perspective. This is a powerful word that has brought new meaning to my life. Thru mindfulness I realized that not only is my perspective

important to take into consideration but others perspective also. This type of thinking allows me to be empathetic towards others including my patients. Mindfulness has changed the way I communicate with others. I now pay closer attention to the possibility of other's viewpoints being different from my own, and I'm ok with that. Being in the present moment allows me to step back and pause before I communicate. I feel I am more calculated when I speak while being mindful. Sometimes the conversation with other just requires me to listen.

The regular practice of meditation has been a challenge. Fitting the exercises into an already overflowing schedule has been a challenge. I feel like I have given it a fair chance practicing the exercises as often as possible. This has been an interesting experiment. The exercises have helped me stay calm in stressful situations and allowed me to connect with my patients on a new deeper level.

All too often in life we focus on the negative, this course has brought a large amount of awareness to the things in life that are positive, such as the simplicity of the sunset, a child's innocence or a simple exchange of appreciation. The mindfulness practices teach us to just be, encouraging an openness to allow things to happen un-forced. Halliwell (2016) explains "With this kind of attitude, we can appreciate beauty, warmth, friendship, and joy, but also sadness and anger, loss and illness, difficulty and disappointment. It may go against our conditioning, but in embracing what's difficult we hold the key to not letting negative thoughts overwhelm us."

One of the other practices this course teaches is mindfulness in daily life. Admittedly this did seem somewhat strange at first. Mindfulness could be practiced in the shower, or washing hands, even brushing teeth. The concept of mindfulness in daily living brings an awareness to the simple things in life such as the way the toothbrush feels against your teeth, or perhaps the taste of the toothpaste with the beginner's mindset. I first experienced this in the shower while

washing my hair. I was paying close attention to the flow of the water gently flowing over my face, and the warmth of the water over my body. Next, I brought awareness to the fresh smell of the shampoo and the feeling of the lathering in my hair. While this exercise only lasted a few minutes, it brought on an overwhelming feeling of calm.

In conclusion, I feel like the journey is not coming to an end but just beginning. I plan to continue my mindful journey incorporating the breathing exercises, body scans, and other yoga movements in my daily schedule. I have worked with patients utilizing some of the breathing exercises to help stay calm in a difficult situation. The best way for me to continue mindfulness is to share it and keep the philosophies of mindfulness at the forefront of my thoughts and actions.

References

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- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness. New York, NY: Bantam Books
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