Join February’s Unconference: Sitting in a circle and talking about what’s really alive for people

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by Susan Kaiser Greenland

Susan Kaiser Greenland, JD, Author, Educator, is the developer and co-founder of the Inner Kids mindful awareness program for children, teens and their families. She is author of The Mindful Child: How to Help Your Kid Manage Stress and Become Happier, Kinder, and More Compassionate (Free Press, 2010).

Have you heard that 2014 will usher in an era of mindful living? It must be true because J. Walter Thompson, a giant advertising agency with considerable qualitative, quantitative and desk research prowess, has identified the top 10 trends for 2014 and mindful living is tenth on the list.

What's more, mindfulness is implicit in several of the top 10 trends. In keeping with this year's second trend “Do You Speak Visual?” here's a video teaser:

It's a funny video and so is characterizing mindfulness as a new trend given its ancient roots in the East and, through Pop icons like Alan Watts, the Beat poets, John Lennon and George Harrison, its decades old roots in the Western zeitgeist. But there's no denying that mindfulness has become trendy and with popularization insiders are both happy and concerned. If you're curious about the positive aspects of the growing mindfulness movement check out Mindful Magazine published by seasoned veterans in the field and, if you're interested in insiders' concerns, read Ron Purser and David Loy's Huffington Post article Beyond McMindfulness.

The trendiness of mindfulness has created an explosion of interest in sharing it with children, teens and families and not unlike popularization itself, growing interest in kids’ mindfulness has created it’s own set of plusses and minuses. Last year, Amy Saltzman and Steve Hickman reached out to Mark Greenberg and me to ask if we'd join them in hosting a symposium connected with this year's Bridging the Hearts and Minds of Youth Conference at UCSD. Together we polled a handful of our colleagues and were especially struck by the following three responses:
* From Chris McKenna with Mindful Schools: “We are looking for issues that are really alive for people and not just theoretical.”

* From Lisa Flook a scientist with The University of Wisconsin, Madison: “How do we engage mindfully (with heartfulness and skillfulness) together and what are mechanisms for explicitly addressing this ongoing group process?”

* From Wynn Kinder with Wellness Works: “Collaboration and cooperation are messy.”

We went back to the drawing board and the symposium morphed into an Unconference with this Native American adage in mind: “In the circle, we are all equal. When in the circle, no one is in front of you. No one is behind you. No one is above you. No one is below you.” Steve carved out a morning for mindfulness veterans, newcomers, and those in-between to sit in a circle and (borrowing from Chris) talk about what’s “really alive for them.” We chose this format with professional group facilitators to ensure the “mindful, heartful and skillful process” that Lisa highlights in her comments above. And, we promise to remember Wynn’s prompt that “collaboration and cooperation are messy”.

Here how the Unconference morning will break down:

* The 1440 Foundation has generously underwritten a significant portion of the event including breakfast starting at 7am.

* We’re honored that Sharon Salzberg will lead a meditation at 8:30am.

* Small, facilitated groups will meet for an hour and a half.

* We’ll conclude with a panel discussion moderated by Mark Greenberg.

Like much of the cutting-edge and field development work that’s happening in the mindfulness world, the Bridging the Hearts and Minds Unconference wouldn’t be possible without a generous grant from the 1440 Foundation.

Veterans slated to join our working circles include Sharon Salzberg from IMS, Mark Greenberg and Christa Turksma from CARE, Jim Gimian and Barry Boyce from Mindful Magazine, Vinny Ferraro and Megan Cowan from Mindful Schools, Lisa Flook from University of Wisconsin, Madison, Randye Semple with USC and UCLA, Lidia Zylowska co-founder UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center, Wynn Kinder from Wellness Works, Chris Willard who wrote A Child’s Mind, Rona Wilensky, Lesley Grant with Marin Mindfulness, Amy Saltzman from Still Quiet Place, Steve Hickman with UCSD and me.

We hope you’ll join us.

The Unconference will be held on the morning of February 7, 2014. For more information and to register visit the UCSD website.
Have you ever found yourself thinking “Why did I eat that?” Have you ever told yourself “You shouldn't take that piece of candy” or “You should eat more carrots”? What about “I just meant to have a handful- but I ate the entire bag of chips!” or “I know I shouldn't eat this but it’s a holiday and everyone else is…”? What would your life be like if these questions and judgments just evaporated into (no pun intended…) thin air?

Ask someone who is a Mindful Eater.

Mindfulness principles are as old as the hills. In the olden days you planted your vegetables, you picked your fruit and you ate to live. Nowadays you buy your frozen dinners, you decide if you want fries with that and you eat to feel better. How did this happen? How did we get here? More importantly how do we fix it? How do we not buy the chocolate Easter candy that only comes out once a year? Or if we do buy the chocolate Easter candy because it only comes out once a year how do we eat only one a day… and not eat the entire box and feel guilty afterwards?

Ask someone who is a Mindful Eater

As a Mindful Eating coach I have seen many people transform their relationship with food into one of nourishment and fulfillment and free from the perils of judgment. As a person who practices mindful eating myself I have been able to change the way I look at food and helped people to do the same.

Just for a moment- given whatever your personal situation is … think about what it might be like to live a day in your life where the food you eat is experienced as fulfilling. A day in your life where you eat because you're hungry, not because you've had a rough day or its “time to eat”.

Changing habits isn’t easy… but it can be done. The Mindful Eating class at UCSD is designed to help us look at food differently. It helps you move from the diets that never work to the lifestyle that does. It helps you move from why did I do that to I can do this.

We all have it within us to change. We just need the right tools and someone to help us along this path. The Mindful Eating Conscious Living Program could be your first step.

Next 4-Week Program Starts on Thursday, April 12 6-7:30 pm

Cherylynn Glaser, M.A. Mindful Eating Teacher

Cherylynn earned her Master’s Degree in Clinical Psychology from the California School of Professional Psychology in San Diego and is currently working on obtaining her PhD. Her primary interests include eating disorders, mindful eating, bariatric surgery and obesity. She spent last summer working as a behavioral coach at a weight loss and wellness camp for children and adults where she taught mindful eating principals as well as provided individual and group therapy. She has also worked with patients who have had weight loss surgery and has co-lead post surgical therapy groups where she taught mindfulness methods. Cherylynn believes that the key components to living a healthy life include the acknowledgement, acceptance, and cultivation of the mind body connection and that mindfulness is a medium through which one can learn to nurture these.

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Cheers! Here’s to Wonderful Old Wine in Amazing New Mindfulness-Based Bottles

By Steven Hickman, Psy.D.
Director, UCSD Center for Mindfulness

A colleague of mine emailed me yesterday to ask my advice. She had submitted a paper for publication in a respected scientific journal that looked at one particular aspect of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). One of the reviewers, apparently intending it as a significant criticism, asked if MBSR wasn’t just “old wine in new bottles”, noting that Carl Rogers and Gestalt therapists had been bringing mindfulness into psychotherapy years before anyone had heard of MBSR. She wanted to know how to respond to this...
Mindfulness is indeed, VERY old wine. Relatively speaking, MBSR and all the rest of the mindfulness-based interventions being devised and deployed in clinical practice these days are indeed quite new “bottles.” But nobody has suggested otherwise! From the beginning, Jon Kabat-Zinn (MBSR), Marsha Linehan (Dialectical Behavior Therapy – DBT), Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy – MBCT) and other treatment developers have openly and reverently acknowledged the very deep and ancient roots of mindfulness, mindfulness practice and the wisdom of drawing on these roots for the relief of suffering.

In his book Full Catastrophe Living, Jon Kabat-Zinn writes:

Although at this time mindfulness meditation is most commonly taught and practiced within the context of Buddhism, its essence is universal. Mindfulness is basically just a particular way of paying attention. It is a way of looking deeply into oneself in the spirit of self-inquiry and self-understanding. For this reason it can be learned and practiced, as we do in the stress clinic, without appealing to Oriental culture or Buddhist authority to enrich it or authenticate it. Mindfulness stands on its own as a powerful vehicle for self-understanding and healing. In fact, one of its major strengths is that it is not dependent on any belief system or ideology, so that its benefits are therefore accessible for anyone to test for himself or herself. Yet it is no accident that mindfulness comes out of Buddhism, which has as its overriding concerns the relief of suffering and the dispelling of illusions. (p. 12-13)

But where the analogy of old wine in new bottles falls apart, is that the “bottles” or the interventions themselves are an integral part of what makes these new programs effective and powerful. These are not meditation classes or silent retreats at remote monasteries, but fully thought out, carefully devised and thoroughly researched psychological interventions that honor the roots of their “wine” and skillfully bring it to suffering individuals in very systematic, deliberate and empirically-supported ways.

A plethora of studies have established MBSR as an effective intervention for addressing the suffering associated with chronic pain, cancer, sleep disturbance, anxiety, and ADHD, just to name a few (Grossman, 2004)(Hofmann, 2010). The 8-week program has been shown to not only reduce a variety of physical and psychological symptoms, but more recently has been shown to bring about structural, measurable changes in the brain itself. Constructed thoughtfully, MBSR has a relatively standardized protocol and logical progression that has consistently (for over 30 years) guided skeptical novices (facing the full spectrum of illness and symptoms, both medical and psychological) through a series of specific exercises and homework practices to a place of ease and equanimity that motivates them to want to continue various forms of mindfulness and meditation practice for years to come.

Focused on helping people alter their relationship with the experiences of their lives (whether those experiences are physical symptoms like pain, or mental phenomena like critical thoughts), mindfulness practice exposes options and flexibility that many never realized they had. One patient of mine with chronic neck and back pain (and significant depression as well) said it best when he noted, "I've been a tough guy all my life. I learned to play hurt in sports, to claw my way to the top of my field, and even to fight every day with this horrendous pain. What mindfulness allowed me to do was to see that I could dance with my pain.”

A recent randomized clinical trial reported in the Archives of General Psychiatry, by Zindel Segal and his colleagues has established MBCT as an equally effective treatment to antidepressant medication in preventing relapse in previously depressed patients (Segal et al. 2010). Based upon the twin foundations of cognitive behavioral therapy and mindfulness, MBCT is being implemented with a wider and wider variety of diagnostic populations with repeated (if still somewhat preliminary) success. The heart of MBCT is encouraging the patient to simply notice the activity and patterns of the mind, adopting a “decentered” stance toward thinking in which thoughts are experienced as arising phenomena in awareness and not fact or imperative. The patient begins to become aware of the constructions of the mind, the “stories” if you will, that the mind constructs around the actuality of experience. The unreturned wave of a friend soon balloons into yet another indication that one is not worthy of friendship. The flutter of a heartbeat in a stressful situation soon billows into the anxious mushroom cloud of the specter of a heart attack. And the patient learns to adopt an abiding presence that notices these processes and recognizes the option to not become entangled in them in the way in which they have in the past.

In his 1923 encyclopedia article “Psycho-Analysis,” Freud noted that “the attitude which the analytic physician could most advantageously adopt was . . . a state of evenly suspended attention, to avoid so far as possible reflection and the construction of conscious expectations.”

“Construction of conscious expectations” indeed! And with some perspective and “evenly suspended attention” one can encounter the frightful booming Wizard of Oz and also notice the presence of the pathetic little man behind the curtain. Thoughts are not facts. “Don’t believe everything you think,” says the bumper sticker.

It is my observation that mindfulness, at its essence, is not a treatment in and of itself. It is a very important component of all good treatment, whether explicitly named or not. It is the attitude that we embody when we work with clients and patients, the space we create with them in the therapy room, and healing force that works in them when they encounter what they have often encountered and respond in a healthy way rather than react in a habitual way. And it can also be utilized in a very specific, explicit and replicable way to address a variety of psychological disorders.
I happily and gratefully acknowledge the roots of the old wine in its “new bottles.” And raise my glass to toast those who have applied their considerable wisdom, experience and intelligence to finding ways to relieve suffering in thousands, if not millions of our fellow human beings.

Cheers!

NOTE: This article will be appearing in the upcoming edition of the newsletter of the California Psychological Association.

REFERENCES:


Segal, Bieling, Young, MacQueen, Cooke, Martin, Bloch and Levitan *Antidepressant Monotherapy vs Sequential Pharmacotherapy and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, or Placebo, for Relapse Prophylaxis in Recurrent Depression* Arch Gen Psychiatry/Vol 67 (No. 12), Dec 2010

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The Shambala Sun Foundation's new website *Mindful* is launched! It holds great potential in becoming a quintessential site for everything mindful.

We are happy to announce the UCSD Center for Mindfulness's inclusion in several categories of mindfulness-related resources listed on *Mindful.*

Please visit *Mindful.org* to watch a video of Jon Kabat-Zinn sharing his thoughts on this comprehensive site's important value.

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Mindfulness for Dummies: The UCSD Connection

Posted on November 23, 2010 by stevepsyd | 1 comment
I (S.H.) was recently honored to be asked by Shamash Aldina to write the foreword for his new book *Mindfulness for Dummies*. The book was published a few months ago, and there I am in the opening pages!

Below is the text of that Foreword. I strongly urge that you check out the book when you have a chance.

Sitting down to start a book has many similarities to sitting down to a great meal. There is a warm felt sense of anticipation (in body and mind) of a pleasant experience. There is curiosity in the mind. There is an awareness of a certain “hunger” for what is about to be taken in. And there we are, fully present to what we encounter before us: whether it is the visual experience of the design of the book or the plate presentation of the meal, whether it is the aroma of a desired food or the fresh smell of a newly-printed and opened book. Perhaps this captures something of your experience as you read these words, but on the other hand, as they say, “your mileage may vary.” Take a moment to stop and notice what your experience ACTUALLY is right now in this very moment. What is the quality of your mind? What do you notice in your body? Are you aware of your breath moving in and out of your body, essentially “breathing itself”?

Few things are more elementally basic and simple, yet so hard to convey in words and instructions, than mindfulness. At its essence it is simply being present, to our experience, our whole experience, and nothing but our experience. Yet you can read that previous sentence dozens, even millions of times, and still not know (at a level well below words) how to systematically practice it and bring it into your life with all its stresses and challenges. The only way to truly know mindfulness and cultivate it in one’s life is to practice it like your life depends on it. Because in many ways it does. The degree to which you can be fully present to your experience, letting go of judgment when it is not useful and truly seeing things as they are, really determines the degree of suffering and stress you will experience in this crazy life of ours.

So the biggest difference between sitting down to this book and sitting down to a fine meal in a gourmet restaurant is that this book, as wonderful, instructional and inspirational as it is, is simply the menu and not the meal itself. We’ve all seen many beautiful menus in amazing restaurants the world over, but not a one of them would have tasted anything like the meals they described! Those menus, like *Mindfulness for Dummies*, simply (but elegantly) point to the real heart of the matter: the practice of mindfulness. A practice that has the potential to nourish and fulfill us in ways that nothing else truly can, and bring equanimity, kindness and balance into every corner of our busy, full lives.

So, the invitation is to approach this book as Derek Wolcott (in his poem *Love After Love*) suggests we approach our very existence: “Sit. Feast on your life.”

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Posted in Mindfulness, Uncategorized
Tagged Mindfulness for Dummies, Shamash Aldina, Steven Hickman, UCSD

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**Jon Kabat-Zinn, Speaking at UCSD**

Posted on November 16, 2010 by steveysd | Leave a comment

Jon gave a wonderful talk on mindfulness and “Coming To Our Senses” a few years back and we had the opportunity to sponsor the talk. I even got to introduce him, which was a real honor. Check it out!
2018 BRIDGING THE HEARTS & MINDS OF YOUTH CONFERENCE – SAVE THE DATE! FEB. 2 – 4, 2018, SAN DIEGO, CA

The core focus of the Bridging conference is to connect people across disciplines, creating connections between the classroom, the laboratory, the therapy room and the living room, to support and foster the growth, study and dissemination of mindfulness for the good of the next generation. This conference is a wonderful opportunity to connect with the people doing the work of teaching mindfulness to our youngsters, to develop skills and competencies to do this work in your particular setting, and to learn what science has to say about this important work. Steven D. Hickman, PsyD UCSD Center for Mindfulness
UC San Diego's Triton alumni magazine gave me UCSD's entire course catalog, from "A Glimpse into Acting" to "Zionism and Post Zionism", a few of which I recognized from when I was a grad student at UCSD. (Apparently I totally missed my opportunity to take "What the *#!?: An uncensored introduction to language") I gave the course catalog to a neural network framework called textgenrnn which took a look at all the existing courses and tried its best to figure out how to make more like them. Complete .tar archive of the UCSD mailing list archives, dating from about 1990 to 2002. Note that most of the later digest issues are primarily spam. See what's new with book lending at the Internet Archive. This year more than ever before, we need your help. The Internet Archive is a crucial resource for students, journalists, programmers, and curious people everywhere, but 2020 has brought unique challenges and unprecedented demand.