

BOOK REPORT

Book: Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness
Meditation in Everyday Life

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HLTH 1240: Theory/Practice of Meditation

Section: 002 (Friday 7:00 am – 8:50 am)

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A big part of me has always been quite intrigued by the idea of meditation, though I cannot honestly say that I have ever understood what it actually means to meditate. If someone would have asked me two years ago what came to my mind when I heard the word “meditation”, I probably would have told them that it is something that religious people do in other countries. This is what I believed, mainly because the only time I had ever seen or heard of anyone meditating was on TV. Reading this book, Wherever You Go, There You Are, was a huge eye-opener for me.

The first part of the book was especially helpful in changing my views on the world of meditation and mindfulness. It helped me to understand that meditation is about finding peace with each moment, not trying to change the past or the future, just simply accepting what is and the things that cannot be changed. Meditation and mindfulness is about being aware of what you are doing and being aware of your thoughts. The goal is to be aware of the thoughts, the feelings and the emotions that pass through you, both negative and positive, while not getting caught up in everything that comes with them. During a meditation, it is important to be in the present moment, letting each thought and each emotion rise to the surface naturally and pass through with ease. It is also natural for the mind to capture a specific thought and trail off with it, which is ok, but the goal is to realize that your focus has wandered and return to the present. In the book, the author discusses that focusing on the breath can act as an “anchor”. When you find your mind wandering off with a specific thought, take a deep breath and refocus. Become aware of each breath as it passes through you. This will help to keep you centered and focused.

This section of the book definitely cleared things up for me. I entered this class with a very broad understanding of meditation. I took this class initially thinking that if I incorporated such a practice into my daily routine I would be happier and more relaxed. As I read the first section of the book I learned that, although an increased sense of happiness and relaxation is a common result of meditation, entering a meditation practice with such expectations can result in complications such as feeling as though you are doing it wrong or that you are unable to do it at all. In the first several chapters, the author answers the question, "Can anybody meditate?". I found this part of the book to be very encouraging for me personally. During my first several experiences with meditation, I had a very difficult time grasping the concept of "letting go" and "being in the moment". It was helpful to know that this is a common problem with new meditators.

In part two of this book, the author touched on a lot of different things that can be helpful during a meditation such as the significance of different hand positions, the duration of a meditation and how allowing your body to be down on the floor gives you a new perspective and has a way of clearing the mind. I would like to discuss a few things that I learned and found to be very helpful for my personal meditation practice.

For one, the author explained the importance of sitting with dignity and posture. Although you want to avoid slouching you also want to avoid sitting up too straight because stiffness means that we are tense or trying too hard. This was extremely helpful for me. When I first started sitting meditations I always found it very difficult to get comfortable enough to relax. After reading this section of the book I realized that I was sitting up too straight which, during my meditation, resulted in pain and muscle spasms in my back. Now, although I am still sitting up straight, I am able to relax while in a seated position and this has greatly improved my ability to focus during a meditation.

This section of the book also discussed coming out of a meditation. I had not thought much about the significance of being attentive while ending a meditation prior to reading this book so the concept was new to me. The author suggests paying close attention to the things that tell you that your meditation is nearing its end. Obviously, when we meditate in a group setting in class, we are signaled out of the meditation with three chimes of a bell. This is different from how I come out of a meditation when I am meditating on my own. I have found that meditating in the morning has been the most effective for me and prior to reading part two of this book I set an alarm on my phone allowing myself 30 minutes for the meditation. In doing it this way, I do not lose track of time. Although this was helpful in the way of time, I have

found that it is not necessarily a great way to come out of a meditation because it voids the opportunity for me to transition mindfully. In using the alarm to end the meditation, I was onto the next activity within minutes without actually thinking about or comprehending what I had just accomplished. With the guidance of the author, I have incorporated some of book's recommendations into my own practice. I do still use the alarm only because I meditate in the morning before getting ready for work. However, I wake up a bit earlier and I set the alarm for a total of 45 minutes. As I near the end of a meditation, I pay close attention to the signs of my mind and my body. These signs vary from day to day. Some days, my body starts to tense up letting me know that I have been in one position too long. Other days, my mind simply brings itself back to the present moment and my meditation ends. Now, each day that I meditate, I make it a point to sit for an additional 2-3 minutes after the meditation has ended to breathe deeply and think about where I have been and where I will be going. In doing this, I have noticed that I am much more aware of not only the transition between a meditation and activities that follow but between each task that I complete throughout the day.

Part three of this book definitely captured my attention and helped me to develop a new emotional link to my meditation practice. For me, this section of the book was not only about improving my understanding of meditation but also about understanding myself, my thoughts, my emotions and my overall outlook on life. There is so many important things discussed in this book and of course everybody is going to get something out of it that maybe others do not. For me personally, I found section titled "Wherever You Go, There You Are" the most enlightening in the third section and possibly even the whole book. Too often in today's world, people just give up on things that they once wanted or believed in. For whatever reason whether it be because something new came along or because the last thing was old or boring. The saying "the grass is not always greener on the other side" came to my mind several times while reading the last part of this book but especially while reading the specific chapter "Wherever You Go, There You Are". The author makes an excellent point when he says that you carry your karma with you. You may be leaving something specific behind, whether it's a job or a significant other, but the issues within yourself that lead you to leave in the first place will follow you everywhere you go. This really hits home for me because I have witnessed first hand what results from this type of thinking. I have witnessed broken families and broken homes. I have also witnessed children being abandoned by their parents because the parents were looking for something less difficult and more pleasurable to occupy their time. The author does an amazing job of encouraging people to work through these issues with the use of mindfulness and meditation. The unfortunate thing is that not all people will realize that they themselves are the problem and therefore will never be open to improvement.

Another section in part three of this book that I found particularly inspiring was the section titled "Parenting as Practice". One of the biggest reasons I decided to take up meditation in the first place is my daughter. Being a young, single mother with a full time job and school has proven to be very challenging and my daughter finds ways to push me to my limits every single day. I entered the world of meditation thinking that if I could allow myself enough time to meditate and collect my thoughts and my feelings, I would be more patient and more available for my child. Although I still do believe that meditating helps significantly with my ability to tolerate challenges throughout the day, this section of the book helped me look at things differently. The author makes it a point to let your children be your teachers. Just simply watching my daughter and not only hearing but listening to her has really helped me to understand her better.

I feel as though I got a lot out of reading this book. I would recommend it to anyone who has an interest in pursuing a meditation practice.