

MBSR: Find your wisdom to face pain, illness and stress

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Special to *The Argus*

Almost 30 years ago, Jon Kabat-Zinn began offering a program of stress reduction for patients and physicians at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. The program aimed to help them find a way to face the pain, illness and stress in their lives so as to live life as fully as possible.

Students included those with cancer, heart disease, fatigue, chronic pain, emotional stress and other challenges. Their physicians referred them to the program when medical treatment could offer them nothing more to help with their suffering.

The program combined stress medicine and psychology with meditation, gentle yoga, experiential education and group dynamic exercises. The eight-week, 30-hour program is known as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Training (MBSR).



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The program is described in detail in Jon's book, "Full Catastrophe Living."

Since that first program, tens of thousands of people around the world have participated in MBSR. Many years of published research shows that the majority of participants report benefits like reduction in pain levels, lasting ability to cope with stress, lasting decreases in physical and psychological symptoms, greater ability to relax and greater energy.

Students with a variety of challenges are helped with MBSR, including those with chronic pain or illness, chronic anxiety or panic, gastrointestinal distress, high blood pressure, headaches, stress, fatigue and more.

So how does this work? Through the techniques learned and practiced in the MBSR program, students begin to work directly with the particular challenges in their personal lives.

One technique, mindfulness meditation, helps cultivate continuous nonjudgmental awareness so that pain or stress is experienced in the context of the full fabric of life.

One student arrived at an MBSR program in a wheelchair with so much pain in

his feet that he couldn't walk. After a few weeks, he came to class using a cane and explaining that he still had the pain, but now he experienced it in the context of his whole life, and it troubled him less.

The program also includes gentle yoga, exercises to help cultivate awareness in daily living, group dialogue and daily homework. Each aspect of the program is designed to help students face what is going on in their lives and learn to work skillfully, so they can experience these challenges as a potential for growth and as part of a full life.

An MBSR program is very challenging. In contrast to many medical and therapeutic treatments, where patients receive a treatment and expect a cure, MBSR is a practice that asks each participant to take personal responsibility for their experience.

Students are given daily homework assignments, and the techniques are learned so students are ultimately in charge of how they practice and what they learn. In this way, students learn to uncover their inherent wisdom to deal with the catastrophes of life while living in a full and open way.

Brant Rogers is an MBSR teacher and Yoga instructor at Yoga Hillsboro in downtown Hillsboro. Free MBSR orientation sessions are offered on a regular basis. For more information, call 503 640-6006, or visit www.yogahillsboro.com.