

Mindfulness Meditation and Rosen Method Bodywork

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Abstract. Similarities and differences between Rosen Method Bodywork and Mindfulness Meditation (MM) are discussed. These include principles of awareness, breath, concentration, and the reality of the body, attitude of acceptance, compassion, and loving-kindness. Both Rosen Method and MM cultivate a calm, accepting, non-judgmental, compassionate, and spacious awareness and presence. The author suggests that Rosen Method practitioners can enhance their work and personal growth with a daily practice of MM.

How Can Mindfulness Meditation Enhance Rosen Method Bodywork?

The purpose of this article is to introduce mindfulness meditation practice to the practitioners of Rosen Method Bodywork and to highlight the basic principles in mindfulness meditation that support the principles of Rosen Method bodywork, principles like awareness, body reality, breath, acceptance, compassion and presence. These principles can be practiced daily in the context of mindfulness meditation and can provide a practice of grounding, and reconnecting to one's own essence and can become a source of wisdom to the practitioner of Rosen Method bodywork.

Introduction

Rosen Method bodywork and mindfulness meditation are part of a spring of awakening in the West. Mindfulness meditation has its origin in the Buddha's time, 2,500 years ago, in India. Rosen Method bodywork has its roots in the Western practices of physical therapy; breath work, and relaxation through the body. Both are powerful modalities in the fields of personal growth and development of human potential.

My first encounter with mindfulness meditation was in 1984. In it, I found a practice that gave me deep understanding and tools for self-examination and self-growth. My encounter with Rosen Method bodywork, a few years later, was a seamless continuation of a meaningful life work that continues to the present day. Based on my experience, combining Rosen Method with mindfulness meditation strengthens and supports my own life process and the healing work I offer.

Marion Rosen's powerful reference to her method, (as I heard it in the training with her): "This is a transformational work from the person we think we are to the person we really are," represents the essence of Rosen Method. It is bodywork that offers release from the barriers that restrict the movement of the life force in the body and mind.

Mindfulness meditation is a Buddhist-based spiritual discipline. Its contemplative approach provides a deep understanding of our human condition; the condition of grasping and holding that causes distress and pain. It answers to the human longing to be free, to live our potential and to discover our true nature, which is naturally compassionate and completely awake.

We tend to hold on, unconsciously, to our inherent beliefs – a heritage of conditions and past experiences – and the stories we tell ourselves. We have an internal dialogue that feeds the pain body. We project those beliefs and conditions of fear, worries, and unhappiness that blocks aliveness in the present moment. Our psyche and the nervous system influence the musculature of the body, causing restrictions and stress. We become hostages to those beliefs, holding us back from flow and aliveness. Rosen Method and mindfulness meditation aim at developing awareness into the depths of our unconscious, helps us to recognize our condition and to release the habitual holdings that cause pain and suffering.

The Principles

The principles of mindfulness meditation that I would like to bring attention to bear direct relation to Rosen Method bodywork. Practicing them can enhance and support the practice of Rosen Method and vice versa: Rosen work can deepen the experience of meditation; in particular, the availability and readiness to become the witness of ones own process. These principles are:

Awareness

Put simply, meditation is awareness. Awareness is a quality of mind that we all have. Mindfulness meditation intensifies this quality through systematic and gentle persevering techniques. The basis of the practice is to directly participate in each moment as it occurs, with as much attention to and understanding of the state of our body and mind as possible. We usually choose a single object

of attention that we are reminded to return to and stay with. This object can be body sensations, breath sensation, thoughts as mental objects, or a perception such as seeing, hearing or touch. This attentive process puts us in direct experience in the present moment. When we are in direct contact with the present moment in the body we are not so entangled in the verbal level of the mind or the internal dialogue. The internal dialogue is mind chatter of incessant thoughts that limits our ability to see who we truly are. When we bring attention to the level of sensation, it allows the internal dialogue to release its grasping in the mind and creates a calmer, quieter space that is often followed by a relaxation in the body. As we attend to the ongoing flow, we discover that the thinking mind is just part of the whole. We realize that our attachment to thinking blocks the rest of our process from consciousness.

A similar development of awareness and attention is required in the practice of Rosen Method bodywork. The practitioner develops awareness of touch, seeing, hearing, and having feelings and awareness of our own breath and thoughts while touching the body of the client. This awareness expands to include the client's breath, the tension in the muscles, and the changes in the body, the tone of spoken words as well as their content. The practitioner is opening herself and is holding the client in spaciousness — a space of all inclusiveness. It is a process of discovering the being beneath the story.

Breath

Mindfulness of breath and breathing is a powerful means in the development of awareness and concentration. The latter are the two main qualities of mind that are developed in meditation. The sensation of breath becomes the primary object of constant awareness. The breath is readily available to us in any circumstances. It is the "gateway to the unconscious" as Marion Rosen points out. Observing the breath puts us in direct experience with our process. The awareness causes us to notice the sensations that occur with the natural coming and going of the air through the nostrils, or the movement in the chest or abdomen. The awareness of sensation accompanying each breath becomes the focus of attention. The breath is in constant change, thus lending itself to deepening concentration as we follow its changes. Following the changes releases the internal dialogue and the chatter in the mind, allowing quiet and spaciousness. Each breath is happening in the moment and so are the next breath and the next one. When we are attentive to our breathing, we cannot get attached to any particular breath; it is the flow that we are observing. The same goes with thinking. We observe the flow of thoughts without attachment to

any one thought in particular. Coming back to our breath helps us discover the power of letting go and deepens our ability to release the mind's conditioned state of grasping. By not judging or clinging in the mind, there is a relaxation in the mind and body. There is a beginning of understanding of mind, the beginning of rising wisdom.

In Rosen Method bodywork, we follow the breath pattern of the client's body and work to allow the release of muscle tension in the diaphragm and related areas. Changes in the breath pattern are an indication of a change in consciousness. When tension is released, the breath deepens, allowing unconscious material to surface to consciousness. This is the focal point of the Rosen Method bodywork.

Concentration

In meditation, choosing a single object of observation develops concentration. Concentration has the ability to direct the awareness and make it one-pointed. When the awareness is sharply focused, all other aspects of body and mind slow down. Our mind, in particular, becomes clear and allows us to observe more of what is happening. The object of concentration becomes the foreground of attention. All other phenomena are coming and going and there is no need to react to them. Each time the attention is drawn away from the object, we gently return to our focus, strengthening the concentration. It is with an attitude of compassion and a kind act of will and perseverance that we bring back the attention to the object. The ability to concentrate is making the mind readily available to the practitioner's awareness as she is touching the client's body, supporting awareness and release.

The Reality of the Body

Our body is the vessel of the sum of our existence. It contains layer upon layer of the history of our physical and emotional experiences. It is the environment we live in.

Both Rosen Method bodywork and mindfulness meditation are opening us to the reality of the body.

In mindfulness mediation the body becomes an object of awareness. We concentrate on body sensations systematically part after part in a "body sweep." Starting from the top of the head – sensing the energy as movement, heat, hardness or softness, vibrations, tingling and so on – and proceeding to move down to the feet and then back again, ending at the top of the head. When the mind wanders, we gently bring the attention back to continue the body sweep. As we move from part to part, feeling the soft tissue or hard bone, we follow the life force as it reveals itself through sensations. The direct contact is opening us to the experience of our life force and to the

pure sensation, no matter how it is manifested. We do not hold onto a single thought, it belongs to the energy of life. We enter the vast space of energy in the body, letting go of thoughts, desires, doubts, and fears, all of which keep us separate from our body. We experience everything as it arises and passes. As perception becomes very subtle through the intensification of concentration and directed awareness, we discover for ourselves that body and mind are not so separate or different. When awareness is open in the body, we tend not to get lost in the head. Our states of mind do not confuse us so easily. We realize the body holds the mind just as the mind contains the body. Deep feelings such as pain, anger, or loss are recorded in the tissue of the body as well as in the mind. In the deep calm that surfaces as a result of the body sweep, the mind can free the body from its holdings, just as in surrender the body can unlock the mind.

In Rosen Method bodywork, this practice is essential to delve into the subtle energy of the body. It sharpens the perceptions of seeing, feeling, sensing and hearing and it creates a relaxed body and facilitates openness to the present moment. This training can help the practitioner to use her body as a very sensitive diagnostic tool. It can signal to the practitioner what is happening in her body as well as in the client's body. Often, during a body sweep, the practitioner can experience memories that are embedded in the tissues of the particular part she is paying attention to. This experience is very powerful and underscores the main premise of Rosen Method, i.e., that memories surface from the held tissue into consciousness as we allow relaxation in the body.

Attitude of Acceptance

An attitude is a state of mind, a feeling, a thought or an opinion. It is the way we see the world. Our attitude colors the experience in the moment and our relationship to it.

The attitude in mindfulness meditation is said to be non-judgmental, open and accepting of what is. No object is any better to observe than any other; nor is any state of mind better than another. In the mind, there is a constant liking and disliking of what is experienced. What we dislike we reject and what we like we grasp, we pick and choose to construct our self-image. The attitude of non-judgmental acceptance allows the myriad of all events to exist without rejecting or clinging or identifying ourselves as being this or that. The non-clinging attitude to what we think we are or what we think we know opens us to a deeper knowing.

The attitude of acceptance, the wisdom of not knowing, to be without preconceptions or expectation is also practiced in the context of Rosen Method. The more

we accept ourselves, the more fully we can experience the world. The more we accept our anger, losses, grief, and pain, the more we can accept others in their difficult experiences. When we can be with our inner selves and with whatever arises in the present moment, we can be with others in the same openness and presence.

Compassion and Loving-Kindness

Letting go of identification and acceptance of what is, non-judging and not grasping, are all coming from a basic attitude of compassion and loving gentleness. When we uncover fear, anger, or any other negative state of mind, we can be overwhelmed. This will last until we accept that state of mind with genuine loving kindness, accepting it fully, with compassion for how human we are. It is only then that we can let go.

Mindfulness meditation emphasizes the interconnectedness of all of life and the relationships we have with ourselves: our body, our breath, and our thoughts and with all life around us. This relationship is practiced as loving-kindness meditation. This practice starts by sending wishes of compassion and well-being to one's own self and then choosing to send it to others.

In Rosen Method bodywork, the hands are the practitioner's agents of loving-kindness. They contain the intention to contact, meet, and know the whole person. The practitioner's attitude is of acceptance and non-judgment. The client's past experiences and difficult memories are felt and seen clearly and are diffused by just allowing them to be. The reactive power of the past dissipates. Mindfulness and loving-kindness helps cut through the difficulties. When practiced, they weaken the forces of reaction and any identification with it.

Conclusion

The practice of mindfulness meditation develops awareness of the present moment, whatever it contains, and brings it into acceptance; sensing the essential now. The primary goal is in maintaining a calm, non-judging wakefulness. This calm, accepting, compassionate, and spacious awareness is the "presence." In the spaciousness of presence there is a letting go. By letting go, a natural balance arises; a knowing arises, and with it comes insight. In the presence is the truth of the moment. It means truly accepting who we are. The principles of mindfulness meditation, which serve as a guide to an inner journey, can be an asset to Rosen Method bodywork practitioners, students, and clients. It can enhance the practice of presence, compassion, and lead us to our inherent wisdom. Both Rosen Method bodywork and mindfulness meditation are served by the need to heal our condition, bring joy

into our everyday life and be fully alive and present in our body and mind. A daily practice of mindfulness meditation can ground and reconnect us to this intention and support the growth of compassion and understanding for the individual and the world around us. The practice provides each practitioner with an opportunity to be supported in her growth, thereby enhancing her own healing.

In my own practice, when there are difficult emotions, I might gently guide the client back into her body and to the sensation of that emotion, helping her to stay and feel the changes as they occur. I experience again and again that the level of acceptance of my own difficulties determines the degree to which I can hold the space for others. As I let go of self-judgment, I am free to receive with compassion. The more I realize my own human nature and frailty and bring loving-kindness to myself, the more I am able to be the container of my clients' processes. I find it to be a daily practice of awareness and willingness to be awake and am fulfilled when I am able to open myself to others in this way.

Let me end by sending blessings to you all in the words of the loving-kindness practice; a blessing that typically ends a ten day silent retreat: "May all beings be free of suffering and the causes of suffering. May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness. May all beings never be separated from the supreme joy that is beyond all sorrow."

References:

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