

CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMS

❖ **BEING WITH SUFFERING: On Change and Loss**

As mental health and healthcare professionals we face the pain and suffering of loss every day—our client’s/patient’s pain and suffering, as well as our own. People who walk into our offices are struggling to understand and cope with some kind of loss—from a child getting onto the school bus for the first time to the dying & death of a beloved parent to the more global realities of living with the effects of climate change. Looking carefully, deeply enough we can see the interdependent relationship between loss and change. One doesn't occur without the other: with change, even positive change, there is a kind of loss; with loss there is, of course, change. And our understanding of these inevitabilities and how we respond to them, with an awareness of their interconnectedness, greatly affect the experience and quality of our lives.

In this workshop we will investigate, from a Buddhist perspective, ways of being with the inevitable pain of being fully human while also investigating ways of responding to the experience of pain that help or hinder the quality of our lives. Core Buddhist teachings will be presented in ways that can complement our psychotherapeutic/counseling approaches when counseling clients, providing us with a deeper understanding of “suffering” and the roots of suffering.

We will read relevant Buddhist texts, participate in discussion, read poetry, sit in meditation, and reflect individually and as a group on what we have learned from the workshop experience.

❖ **AN INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY & ITS APPLICATION TO COUNSELING PRACTICE**

In this workshop, Buddhism as a psychology, i.e., a study of “mind”, will be presented, and its relevance as a complementary psychological theory and practice to contemporary counseling practices will be explored. Also presented will be mindfulness-based counseling approaches and programs that have emerged in the West; styles of meditation practices (including indications and cautions); and a review of the research being conducted related to the effects of mindfulness practices on physiological systems (neurological, cardiovascular, immunological).

The intention of this workshop is to introduce mental health practitioners to an area of psychological study that although first described in ancient times is still relevant today, offering a perspective that can be deeply beneficial and rewarding to clients and practitioners alike.

❖ **TRANSFORMING WORDS: The Use of Poetry in Counseling and Caregiving**

As counselors and care providers listening to the stories of our clients, we know that words have the power not only to cause varying degrees of emotional/ psychological harm to a person (e.g., when used to denigrate and shame, manipulate and control), but also to transform pain and suffering into a healing, integrative experience. Words provide a means by which we build and interpret our existence: it is through word language—the creation of stories—that we make meaning of our experiences and our world.

The more mindful we are of the stories that shape our lives (which are highly subjective and oftentimes unconscious) and the various conditions contributing to their unfolding, the more aptly we can negotiate what goes on inside ourselves and how we relate to others and the world around us. Without awareness and understanding, our stories can be like mysteries, with hints and clues interspersed throughout our thoughts, emotions, behaviors, body sensations, and sometimes the more chronic somatic experiences of pain, fatigue and illness. These fragmented experiences can become “caught” in our mind/body when words are not accessible to help weave the pieces into a coherent, meaning-making story. And, for many people (including myself) finding the words to tell our stories is often difficult.

While there are many valuable “non-word” ways to access and express experiences (music, dance, the visual arts, etc.), it is through words that we understand and translate what is accessed through the non-word modalities. Word language is the medium through which integration, healing and transformation occur.

In this workshop, we will explore the powerful word language medium of poetry and various ways in which poetry is helpful as a therapeutic tool in counseling and caregiving. I will share poems I have found helpful in my work with clients, and we will read poems out loud, engaging the senses (hearing, seeing, feeling, etc.) and the imagination as we explore how poems can assist in the healing process. You will leave with a list of poems and poetry resources to use in your counseling/ caregiving practice and with an understanding of the transformative and therapeutic power of poetry.

❖ **TRANSFORMING WORDS: Entering Into “The Peace of Wild Things”***

Caregiving is a universal activity with emotional, physical and spiritual effects experienced by those offering the care and those who are the recipients. Nature is, for many, a place of solace and healing—we are, after all, a part of nature. This workshop addresses these two universals.

*“..... I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought*

*of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.”*

from * **The Peace of Wild Things**
Wendell Berry

As caregivers, we know how the mind-body-spirit can become deeply weary when tending to the lives of those needing our listening ears, our able mind and body, and our loving heart. For many of us, caring for others often takes precedence over caring for ourselves. And we may push aside the warning signals of wearing out until they can no longer be ignored: we become irritable and resentful, get sick, lose connection with friends and loved ones, and feel so miserable and alone that our ability to do what it is we truly want to do—care for others—is unsustainable, no longer what we can or even want to be doing.

In this workshop, we will explore one way—the reading of poetry—to preempt such “soul-fatigue”. While spending time in nature—walking in the woods, sitting in the sun, swimming in a lake—is a source of nourishment and renewal for many people, it may not always be feasible to go to a beautiful and restful place in nature. At such times, engaging the senses and the imagination through the reading of a poem can provide a meditative respite.

The poems selected for this workshop bring the natural world to us when we are unable to go to it. We will read poems out loud, experiencing the power of words to nourish and replenish. You will leave with a number of sources for poems and with an understanding of the transformative power of poetry. (If you would like, please bring one or two poems that you have used in your counseling/caregiving practice or that you think would be appropriate.)

The focus of the workshop is on reading already written and published poetry, rather than writing poetry as a creative and/or therapeutic expression; and, it is not about reading poetry as an evocative therapeutic intervention, but using it as a meditative means for slowing us down, bringing attention into the here and now through engaging our senses, and connecting us with the renewing aspects of nature.

Reading and reciting poetry can be a means for a guided meditation or for self-hypnosis. With practice, this activity can be an accessible element of a sustainable self-care plan for caregivers.

❖ **LIVING A “SUCCESSFUL” LIFE: The Language of Compassion and Compassionate Action in Healing Relationships**

Growing up in Western society, we have been conditioned to believe that independence, competition and hard work are the factors that lead to a “successful” and, therefore, “happy” life, and if we are not successful and happy it is because we and/or someone else and/or some circumstance is at fault. The ensuing judging and blaming often undermine healthy

relationships, whether towards others or towards oneself. While we can certainly think of individuals who appear to have achieved success and happiness “the American way,” how many others have we met for whom this has not been the case? Verbal and non-verbal messages we regularly receive (and give) reflect, often unconsciously, the core attitudes and values of the rugged and fiercely competing individualism of our culture. Indeed, one does not need to experience violence and abuse and extraordinary stress to feel debilitating fear, shame and insecurity— the all-too-frequent emotional by-products of messages of expectation, comparison and judgment we receive daily. As counselors, educators and healthcare providers we all too often see the harmful effects of this approach to life.

In this workshop we will explore how such messages detrimentally affect the quality of our lives: the ways we relate (thought, speech and action) to ourselves and to others; our ability to be fully present in our lives; and our ability to live life fully, including living our full potential. We will explore how mindfulness practices —bringing what is unconscious into consciousness—are true mindfulness practices only when integrated with qualities such as kindness and compassion. We will look specifically at the cultivation of compassion, beginning with the language of compassion (alongside mindfulness), as a vehicle for healing. And we will see that through such healing, one does not need to compete and “succeed” in the Western, American way to be happy and content with life.

❖ **MEDITATION, HYPNOSIS AND DISSOCIATION: Similarities, Distinctions, and Why We Need to Know**

Understanding the nature of mind with its various mental states and how these mental states affect our well-being has been the subject of study in the fields of psychology (including hypnosis), religion/spirituality and philosophy for thousands of years. However, as is oftentimes the case, there's a group of people here and another there, all doing good and important work, but separated by various limitations and constraints: professional, institutional, funding competition, interest and experience, and dare I say it—ego. What is different now from earlier times is our global connection and information accessibility via technology and the Internet. It is much easier today to see the common threads that could, with cooperative intention, weave a fabric of understanding that would be of benefit to all.

As more people seek meditation experiences at established meditation retreat centers, at community-based meditation gatherings and with the growing number of on-line meditation communities; and, conversely, as “mindfulness” and meditation practices leave the meditation halls of spiritual communities, increasingly becoming integrated into multiple facets of Western culture—psychology, mental and physical health care, education, business, even the military—it is important that as responsible prescribers of mindfulness and meditation we understand the psycho- spiritual (and cultural) complexities of these practices. Whether inside or outside meditation practice communities, it is increasingly becoming clear to us today that these practices are not always as straightforward, beneficial and harmless as we may have thought. We have much to learn from each other. In fact, we need to learn from each other. As the Zen saying goes, *“A right tool in the wrong hand becomes a wrong tool.”*

❖ **MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION IN THE MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSION (20-HOUR CE PROGRAM)**

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❖ **THERAPIST, KNOW THY SELFING: Counselor Awareness in the Counseling Relationship**

Integrating mindfulness practices into our own daily lives is important and beneficial for counselors and caregivers for many reasons. In this workshop, which is predominantly experiential, we will explore how mindfulness practices enhance therapeutic presence, improve empathic/compassionate response and aid in the prevention of “burn-out” and compassion fatigue.

❖ **BUDDHIST ETHICS, COUNSELOR ETHICS: Comparative & Complementary Practices**

A common thread running through the wisdom traditions of the world is the entreaty to “do no harm”. A unique aspect of Buddhism, one of these wisdom traditions, however, is the specificity and detail of the guidance offered for living life in ways to minimize harm done—to others, including all sentient beings, and to oneself. At the center of Buddhist psychology and philosophy is “*sīla*”, the Pali word for *ethical/moral practice, morality or virtue*. *Sīla* is one of the aggregates (categories) of the Eightfold Path (the other two—the concentration aggregate and the wisdom aggregate), the practice of which can significantly lessen harm done and the suffering that results from unskillful, inappropriate actions of thought, speech, and action, including the ways we use our time.

Buddhism has been described as a religion, as a philosophy, as an ethics, and as a psychology. In this workshop we will consider how Buddhist teachings as an ethics complement the ethical guidelines of our mental health and healthcare professions. Please bring a copy of your profession’s code of ethics, and I will provide relevant Buddhist texts, commentaries, and resource information. Also, bring a counseling practice situation you might like to discuss. We will spend our time together examining ways Buddhist teachings may (or may not) be relevant to our mental health and healthcare professional practice.