

PEACE @ UMBC MEDITATION GROUP

Welcome! We are excited that you are considering joining us for our Friday afternoon meditation hour from 1-2 p.m. in the UMBC Women's Center. We wanted to provide you with information up front so that you know how the group works and feel comfortable joining us anytime. The following pages include information about our group and how it's structured as well as details about the Meditation Boot Camp program at UMBC, basic information about meditation, and tips on setting up a home practice.

The Peace@UMBC Meditation Group meets weekly on Fridays and aims to:

- Offer a semi-structured process and basic tools for practicing sitting meditation;
- Instill confidence in your ability to sit independently (i.e., create a sustainable meditation practice);
- Create a community of practitioners on campus;
- Build the capacity for intentional living (choosing how to respond instead of react to situations); and
- Assist in helping you embody peace within yourself and your relationships.

Co-creating Our Community

There are certain ground rules that are important to this community:

- honoring the time commitment that we and others are making by being on time;
- turning off cell phones;
- being respectful of others and differing views;
- owning that our speaking is ours (we don't have 'the truth'...only 'our truth');
- speaking one person at a time; and
- confidentiality - what's said in the room stays in the room.

What is Meditation?

Meditation is at its basic core a way of turning our attention inside to our inner experience and seeing it objectively. This is more of an approach than a definition. Our hope is that this approach is broad enough to serve across varied meditation traditions. You will find in this group that our facilitators each have their own unique style and way of meditating. In time, you will discover your style and methods that work best for you.

Session Flow

We will have a beginner class the first Friday of each month. We will cover instruction in sitting meditation, conscious breathing, and ways to set-up a regular meditation practice. There will be time for Q&A at the end of class.

Each subsequent class will have different facilitators but will follow a loose structure that includes:

- an introductory, centering meditation;
- a longer guided meditation;
- brief conversation and/or invitation on how to apply meditation tenets in life - i.e., off the cushion; and
- we may also at times include partner exercises and large group discussion.

These sessions will be organic in nature and not as structured as taking a meditation class. If you're interested in a structured process, see the next page which offers information about the Meditation Boot Camp program.

Meditation Boot Camp – An 8-week free mindfulness meditation program for UMBC faculty, staff and students

If you are tired of letting circumstances in your life rule you and are serious about embodying peace, this is the program for you. Over the course of this transformational program you will learn the basics of mindfulness meditation, a powerful healing modality that focuses on being in the present moment. Meditation has proven effective for lowering blood pressure, improving immunity, improving creativity, improving productivity, improving sleep quality and decreasing chronic pain. Over the course of this program you will learn:

- Deep breathing for regulation of the central nervous system,
- Mindfulness Meditation for releasing stress and anxiety,
- Lovingkindness Meditation for improving outlook and relationships,
- Practices to make life more peaceful and fulfilling.

This in-depth program includes several components:

- **In-person Sessions** - Classes are offered twice a week: instruction sessions on Thursdays (4:45-6:00 p.m.) and integration sessions on the following Tuesdays (12:00-12:30 p.m.) for a total of 8 instruction sessions & 7 integration sessions (NOTE: Participants can miss 1 of the instruction sessions and 2 of the integration sessions);
- **Commitment to a daily progressive meditation practice** - working from 5 min a day up to 25 min a day;
- **Reading** - “Mindfulness in Plain English” over the course of the program (*downloadable for free at: <http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma4/mpe.html>*);
- **Weekly conversations with other classmates** – on class lessons, weekly readings from the book, how your practice is going, etc.
- **Coaching** - participation includes an optional 30-minute coaching session to support integration of meditation tenets into professional/personal life; and
- **Participation Pre and Post Program Evaluation** - participants will agree to participate in before/after metrics to measure program effectiveness.

Stay tuned for Spring 2014 dates which will be listed on the UMBC Training Group: www.umbc.edu/training.

If you'd like to be added to an interest beforehand, please contact Jill Weinknecht Wardell at Jwardell@umbc.edu.

BASICS OF MEDITATION PRACTICE

Adapted from the website, *11th Step Meditation* (www.11thstepmeditation.org)

When to meditate? Mornings are best, but anytime you can find 15 to 20 minutes in a relatively quiet location will be ok.

Where to meditate? Find a comfortable place to sit that is relatively quiet, where you will not be disturbed. You may hear outside noises or experience distractions, but that is ok.

How to sit? There are meditation practices that suggest specific postures for sitting. You will have a better chance of staying awake while meditating if you sit up straight with your hands in your lap. If you're comfortable sitting in the lotus or half-lotus position seen in Asian traditions, you may do so. It's just as good to sit in a firm but comfortable chair with your back straight and feet on the floor.

A few words about thoughts during meditation. It's easier for beginning meditators to use a mantra, sacred word, or a guided meditation that is active or that uses affirmations and imagery to concentrate on to start with. This gives you something to concentrate upon and help detach from the constant stream of thoughts. There are many good guided meditation recordings at bookstores and libraries. If you use a guided meditation, work with it a number of times before you practice it by yourself so you are familiar with the each step.

Our minds are designed to think and they usually keep us very busy reminding us of our past mistakes, replaying emotional scenes in our mind or worrying about what will happen in the future. You cannot stop your mind from thinking as you meditate, nor should you. The trick is to learn to not grab onto any particular thought or to let it dominate your attention. When that happens, just gently return to the focus of your meditation.

As thoughts arise in your meditation just watch them float by, as if on a cloud or in a stream. It is fine to notice these thoughts. Become the observer of your thoughts. This is essentially the practice of meditation. Know that this will be a skill that becomes easier the more that you meditate.

For mindfulness meditation: Bring your attention to the sensation of the flow of the breath in and out of the body. You can attend to the rising and falling of the abdomen or the sensation of air flowing in and out of your nostrils. As you do this, try to remain aware of whatever thoughts, sensations, noises, etc., arise in the moment, and let them pass, like a cloud passing across the sky. When you find yourself "hooked" by a particular thought, memory, or sensation, you can either gently return to awareness of the breath or label the thought or sensation before returning to the breath. Again, the idea is to attend to what is being experienced, without reacting to or judging that experience.

Excellent meditation books for beginners include:

"Mindfulness in Plain English" by Bhante Gunaratana – downloadable for free at:
<http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma4/mpe.html>

"Meditation for Beginners" by Jack Kornfield

"Mindfulness for Beginners" by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Creating a Home Meditation Space

From: http://www.essortment.com/lifestyle/createhomemedi_trpm.htm

Creating a space in your home that is dedicated to the practice of meditation is a key element in incorporating it into your everyday routine. Having a meditation space will enable you to make meditation a regular habit in your life.

Knowing how important meditation is to your overall well-being, designating a special place in your home for this practice should be a natural choice. If you have the space to allow an entire room for this purpose, that's very good, but not necessary. First, have a look around your home. Evaluate the areas of your house for their comfort level, their simplicity, and their privacy.

The key elements for a meditation space are comfort, empty space, and removal from interruptions. You will not want to attempt to carry out your meditation practice in a room that is cluttered or contains communication devices such as a phone or ringing doorbell. Also, if there are other members in your household to consider, let them know that you need a section of time without any interruptions.

Sitting is the best position for meditation so you might want to create a space around a comfortable chair or selection of floor pillows. You may desire a dark or dim space, while others will find this causes them to feel sleepy. An open window can be a very good element in your meditation space. Remember though that meditation can be done anywhere and should not require a specific place, chair, or room. It requires only the appropriate mindset and a segment of devoted time. Most agree that a daily meditation of 20 to 30 minutes is best.

You will want your meditation space to be free of clutter and objects that your energy will bounce off of and get tangled in. Look for an area of your home that has a free-flowing feeling or dedicate a day to removing all unnecessary items for your special place.

You should surround your meditation space with things that are special to you and enhance your feeling of peace and calmness. You may want to hang a special picture on the wall and place a cozy throw blanket near your sitting area. You may want to supply your meditation space with candles which you can light with intention at the beginning of your practice each day.

The most important aspect of any home meditation space is that it enables and encourages you to develop a daily meditation practice. But be sure not to allow yourself to rely on this space as the only path to those peaceful and relaxed moments when your mind is quiet and your spirit is given a chance to roam free.