A COURSE FOR GALAXY CLINICIANS AND STAFF

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

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Summary/Questions Session One
Arriving to Presence
BRIEF SUMMARY

1. The vessel or container for meditation: the body and the body’s posture. When sitting in a chair, aim for an upright posture, rather than leaning back. Lengthen the spine. As if you were fine tuning with a dial, seek a balance between relaxation and alertness. You may wish to fold a blanket or towel and place it under your sitting bones. Having the hips slightly higher than the knees can be helpful for the spine. If you need additional back support, take a sweatshirt or jacket, roll it up, and put it in the small of your back. Hands can be placed up or down on the knees or cupped in your lap. Gently close the eyes or, if you prefer to keep your eyes open, close the eyes partially and gaze down downward.

2. Presence: basic skill: entering into presence, being present. With the fast pace of our culture and the multiple demands on our lives, we easily lose connection to who we are, to others, to what matters most. We are like the character in the James Joyce story who lived a short distance from his body. We are not present to our lives, present to what is actually taking place.

QUESTIONS

1. When do people usually practice? I think people generally choose to meditate in the morning,
shortly after arising, or in the evening, prior to sleep (but NOT instead of sleep or to fall asleep).

I am going to add a further interpretation of this question. Perhaps the question might be: how can I best set up my own meditation practice? What have other people done to set up their practice? For general suggestions, please refer to the handout on setting up your practice. To put yourself in an optimal position for creating a daily meditation practice, look at and respect your daily energy rhythm. Are you more alert in the morning? Or more ready to take on contemplation in the evening? What is the ebb and flow of energy in your household like? Could you capture that truly quiet half hour before the children and your spouse get up?

I meditate twice daily, once in the morning, once in the evening. Sometimes, if I am mentally, physically, and/or emotionally fatigued in the afternoon, I will do a third, briefer meditation. In the morning, after caring for the animals and opening the house, I will make a small cup of chai and sip it by candlelight before meditating. In the evening, I like my house to be in order, my self sorted out and ready for bed. Prior to meditating, I write in my gratitude journal.
2. Is it okay to focus at times on external things like the music, or is it important to only focus on my body?

The short answer is, yes.

However, I would like to give this question an overall framework. There are many many meditations on a multitude of topics, utilizing different methods or techniques. The Insight Timer app (see handout) alone provides over 19,000 meditations. Two key anchors in meditation are: 1) the breath and 2) body sensations. They will be discussed in the course. A meditator may decide to spend a month practicing various breath techniques or to add a loving kindness practice to the last minutes of daily meditation.

Use a meditation app (see Insight Timer handout), for your daily meditation.

This question asks, at the deepest level, how should I treat my mind? How should I train or discipline my mind? My attention? That is at the core of this training. Training the mind takes practice and time.

3. Why did I feel like my arms and legs were absent/phantom like?

There can be multiple reasons for this. On a practical level, check your posture; make sure
you are not slouching and cutting off circulation. Body sensations are normal, including lack of feeling or numbness. We will have a session on body sensations. This can also occur when we are deep in a meditation and we come out rather quickly. Invite yourself to be curious about these sensations. Let yourself examine them without judgment and with kindness.

4. What do I do when my mind wanders?
Classic question! We will address this throughout the course, with one session specifically on this topic. You will learn two “anchors”: the breath and body sensations in the first half of the course, then specific techniques for dealing with distraction and the mind wandering.