

Dear Friend of Jewel Heart,

I am very happy that you have registered for this workshop on the Neuroscience & Psychology of Meditation: Neurobiology of Mindfulness-based Pain management.

I am very eager for all of us to spend this time together learning about how mindfulness and compassion meditation can be helpful for managing chronic pain, as well as the stress, worry and anxiety, and negative mood that can often come along with chronic pain and very often make the impact of chronic pain on one's life even worse.

The workshop will be recorded and available for "on demand" streaming.

As you know, we are living through some challenging times. The disease and social burdens of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as stress from the resulting economic downturn are profoundly impacting people's level of stress and worry. Recent polling finds that nearly half of US adults report negative mental health impact due to worry and stress over the virus, and these impacts can be found world-wide. Necessary public health measures taken to slow the transmission of the virus and prevent loss of life, including social distancing, business and school closures, and shelter-in-place orders, have also unfortunately led to increased isolation, job losses, and increased financial distress. Of course, many people had high levels of stress before the COVID-pandemic! Again, polling also shows that about a quarter of US and Canadian people described themselves as 'quite a bit' or 'extremely' stressed, and about another half described themselves as 'a bit' stressed. The struggle for human rights and justice throughout the world, as exemplified by the Black Lives Matter movement, is also a source of great hope and inspiration, and for many of us considerable worry as well.

I believe meditation can be helpful in our lives in many ways, including improving our quality of life and reactions to pain. However, it is very important to recognize that meditation cannot make pain "go away" (I honestly wish it could) nor is it a panacea or a "cure-all" for stress, or for worry, anxiety, and depression. However, meditation can be one very helpful tool for us to help us manage our stress and maintain wellness and a sense of balance in the face of challenges. And we think learning more about how meditation can be useful, and the neuroscience that it known about it, is a great way to spend a day together!

Neuroscience research on mindfulness has revealed that people who practice regularly have discernable changes in their brain structure. This is called neuroplasticity. We now know that learning continues throughout life, and the brain is continually being shaped by experience. This suggests that the more we practice mindfulness, the easier it will become to be mindful in moments of difficulty.

We are primarily going to be discussing (and trying out for ourselves) a number of meditative practices involving mindfulness and cultivating a sense of loving-kindness and compassion that have been used in many clinical programs for pain management at major academic medical centers across the world. Many of these are drawn from or inspired by traditional Buddhist meditation practices, but the meditation we will be talking about and experiencing / practicing together is not necessarily Buddhist, and it will be presented in a secular, non-religious manner. The forms of meditation we will discuss are now part of a growing number of psychotherapies and stress reduction programs using meditation therapeutically, including Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness-based Cognitive therapy (MBCT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Cognitive-based Compassion training (CBCT), Compassion

Cultivation Training (CCT), Mindful Self Compassion (MSC), Mindfulness-based Relapse Prevention (MBRP), and many more kinds of therapy and “alphabet soup”...

So we invite you to consider this workshop to be a basic experiential and educational event about basic psychological practices to promote emotional balance and wellness, not necessarily “Buddhism” per se. On the other hand, if you are Buddhist, you are also most welcome! We have plenty of seats available ☺

A couple of housekeeping issues that are important to mention and for us to agree.

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This workshop will provide general educational information about the psychology and neuroscience of pain and chronic pain disorders, as well as neuroscience of stress, worry, anxiety, and depression, and will provide some general instruction in practice of mindfulness and compassion meditations that have been found to be helpful for pain management, promoting wellness, and managing stress. This workshop is intended for general educational purposes and wellness enhancement purposes only. Dr King is a licensed psychologist, but participation in this workshop is not psychotherapy or medical service and is not and is not intended as a substitute for psychotherapy or any medical service.

By registering for this educational and experiential workshop, I explicitly acknowledge my agreement that this workshop does not constitute psychotherapy or any other mental health or healthcare service relationship with Dr King, and it is not intended as a substitute for psychotherapy or any other mental health treatment. Engaging in meditation practices can rarely lead to distressing thoughts, memories, and upsetting emotional reactions in some people. By registering in this workshop I acknowledge that I agree that should I experience distress during this workshop, I agree that I will take appropriate steps to care for myself, including seeking health care services as necessary. Participants who experience distress are welcome to reach out to the presenter via chat for assistance with finding appropriate mental health services nearby them, but by registering I acknowledge my understanding and agreement that a reply will not possible until after the end of the workshop, and that this contact does not represent a therapeutic relationship or mental health service.

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The exercises we will practice together can be useful to help you find ways to be more fully aware and present in each moment of life. The good news is that this can make life more interesting, vivid, and fulfilling. On the other hand, this also means facing what is present, even when it is unpleasant and difficult. In mindfulness practice we believe you will find turning to face and acknowledge difficulties, rather than avoiding them, can be the most effective way to reduce unhappiness, worry, and anxiety. It is also central to preventing further depression and anxiety. Seeing unpleasant sensations, feelings, thoughts, or experiences clearly, as they arise, means that you will be in much better shape to manage and handle them, responding in a manner of your choice, and can be helpful for finding ways to respond to patterns of anxiety that may “snowball” or turn into a “thought tornado”.

In the workshop, I will try to provide some gentle ways to use mindfulness practices to explore intense physical sensations that may be present as we sit together and meditate – for example, pain that may be present if you have chronic pain - and also face and explore our patterns of mental and emotional reactivity

to intense sensations and pain. In some ways this work is not for the timid, and it is possible we may come into contact with strong feelings and emotions. Sometime as well, when we meditate we may find we come face-to-face with some other intense feelings, perhaps about losses or traumas, or other kinds of difficulties that may be “bubbling under the surface”. But it is important to know that, for some people at some times, turning towards difficulty can result in some challenges or difficult thoughts or emotions which can become overwhelming. It is important that you have access to local support in the event of any upsetting experiences. If possible, we also recommend that you arrange to receive additional support from a family member or friend during the program.

It is possible there may be a time when you start to feel overwhelmed during a meditation session. We refer to such situations as having moved outside of your “Window of Tolerance” and into fight, flight, or freeze mode.

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Fight or Flight Mode

- I Experiencing the urge to flee or leave immediately
- I Experiencing overwhelming images, memories, anxiety, or worries
- I Unable to learn and take in new information

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Window of Tolerance

- I Able to safely be with and explore your experience, even when it is uncomfortable or unpleasant
- I Able to learn and take in new information, from self and others

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Freeze Mode

- I Feeling numb or disconnected
- I Feeling out of tune with thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations
- I Unable to learn and take in new information

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If you find yourself Outside your Window of Tolerance If possible, please let the facilitator(s) know that you are taking a break to take care of yourself.

Consider one or more of:

- I Opening your eyes
- I Standing up, feeling your feet on the ground
- I Taking slow, in-breaths, with longer exhales
- I Drinking a glass of water or making a cup of tea
- I Wrapping yourself in a blanket
- I Naming five things you can see, hear, and feel (physically); describing them in as much detail as possible
- I Splashing water on your face and hands

Sincerely, Tony King (734) 709-4744 personal direct mobile