Approaches to Holistic Wellness

Interview with Khare on Meditation by David Snebold

Note: Priyadarshi Khare (known as “Khare”) leads meditation sessions at the weekly meetings of DBSA (the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance) at McLean Hospital. I spoke with him recently about many aspects of meditation. – DS

How did you get into meditation?
What happened was that my wife had a hospitalization...That was very stressful for me. So then I saw an ad on the T saying “free mindfulness-based stress reduction course” or MBSR. And I said, oh this is great, so they’re doing a study at MGH. But when I called down they said you’re not eligible because you’ve been mediating. I told them I had been doing some breathing meditation in India but it wasn’t really meditating it was just the breath... But they said we need people who don’t know any type of meditation at all. So I said OK, then I started looking into courses and I did a couple of courses, adult education courses. Then I went to...UMass Medical Shrewsbury where I did the MBSR A3 course, that is a gold standard course MBSR. Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. After that I was very regular. Now I meditate about an hour every day at least. Minimum.

How long have you been practicing meditation?
Yeah, so this was 2016 I really started meditating...So before that off and on but after 2016 I was very regular – every day I was meditating.

What would you recommend to someone who is new at meditation?
I would say join a course. You know, that’s the best way to do it because you can read books, you can watch videos, but you need to establish a practice. In that course they force you to meditate 45 minutes a day. That’s your homework. So every day you have to meditate, for eight weeks 45 minutes a day. So that kind of sets a habit, you know. You get into the habit of meditating. So that’s what I’m saying – it’s good to do a course because those guys are trained teachers and they can teach you how to meditate and they can troubleshoot problems. If you are having some problems, they can help you.

What would you recommend to someone who has been meditating for some time?
So in meditation one of the attitudes is called “beginner’s mind.” You approach each meditation like it’s the first time you’re meditating, right. You don’t know what’s going to come up so every mediation is different so even if you’re experienced. I think it’s good to have a beginner’s mind so you’re always fresh, you’re not like jaded. You may have been doing this breath meditation already for 30 years but,
you know, you can still do breath meditation for the 31st year because it's going to be fresh. Every time you sit down it's going to be a different experience.

**Who are some of your biggest influences in the field of meditation?**

My biggest influence was Diana Winston. She's at the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC). She still teaches there. I got her book and I heard her recordings; you know, I liked the way she taught mindfulness. So, she was my biggest influence.

**In what ways do you find meditation helpful?**

So meditation is helpful, the course is called “stress reduction,” right, but it's not actually reducing the stress – things happening in your life are always going to cause some kind of stress – but it helps in not amplifying the stress. Not taking things personally.

Like, if I'm in traffic and somebody honks behind me. So my gut reaction is “What the heck, man?!?” Well, maybe that guy is honking at somebody else. It's just a sound, the sound of a horn. But if I take it personally then I start feeling bad. I get into a loop saying “what a jerk, he's honking at me.” Doesn't he see that there's a pedestrian in front of me, or whatever the story is. You start amplifying the stress. Sometimes I carry the frustration with me for days, ruminating about the experience.

Then sometimes I look back and see it's my friend honking to say hello and waving at me. Now I have a very different, happy reaction.

Meditation helps me take a pause, not react immediately to a horn honking or to any other stress. Not to immediately amplify my first, negative gut reaction. That's just an example but things like that happen. Mindfulness helps you when your wife or your mom says something that makes you feel sadness or anxiety. It gives you the perspective not to amplify the negative and then keep brooding about it.

**Do you find music helpful while meditating? If so what kinds?**

Music is not supposed to be used. I mean in some cases it is used but I don’t use it because music is basically a distraction, right -- you don’t have to think about your problems. So when you’re feeling sad or have a headache or whatever you listen to music and it’s good it helps you distract you know you’re not always going to be mindful so it’s a distraction. But after the track is over then what did you get out of that? You know you’re back to the same then so then what do you do?

Mindfulness is different it’s a skill you cultivate slowly so it’s not a distraction. It helps you deal with your problems as they are without amplifying them, without proliferating them. this is the problem this is the size of the problem you know I'm not making it into a big huge problem you know this is the thing but it's not going to go away the mindfulness is there you know but if I look away it's still going to be
there so music in that way I asked the same question a long time back and it is used in some meditation but I don’t use it.

**Apart from meditation, what do you find are the best ways to relax?**

Sometimes visualization is good; music is good. You know, relaxation comes with all these things. And you know you can meditate while walking, while sitting, while standing, while lying down. You can meditate in any posture so there are different ways you can do it. But in terms of relaxation, that is time off from meditating, then sometimes it’s just taking some time off. You know, sitting on the beach visualizing; yeah, that’s good.