

# Integrating Meditation into Higher Education: The Founding Mission of CIIS as an Education for the Whole Person

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the introduction of meditation practice into higher education as part of an integral approach to education. A number of current authors are cited emphasizing the importance and relevance of mindfulness meditation in daily life. In addition, California Institute of Integral Studies founder Haridas Chaudhuri's philosophy of meditation and its connection to action are explored.

**Key Words:** California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS); higher education; integral education; meditation; mindfulness.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is already being identified by several distinguishing themes, including the *Global Age*, the *Planetary Age*, the *Digital Age*, the *Spiritual Age*, the *Mindful Age*, and so on. All valid labels no doubt; and there will be many more that we can't possibly imagine from our present vantage point. In this article I will discuss one of these labels—the *Mindful Age*—by focusing on Dr. Haridas Chaudhuri's founding vision of integral education for CIIS and its relevance to the study and practice of mindfulness today.

Chaudhuri developed an extensive model of integral education that was inspired by Sri Aurobindo's integral vision and philosophy that connected meditation to human action. He intended that his version of integral education provide “a well rounded program for balanced personality growth of the human individual” (Chaudhuri, 1977, p. 77).

In his book *Integral Yoga*, Chaudhuri (1965a) wrote:

The essence of integral Yoga lies in the balanced union of meditation and action. It is only through such union that creative freedom can be achieved. Through meditation one is more integrated with the inner self and united with the Supreme Being. Through action one is more and more integrated with the outward environment, natural, social and historical, and communicates with the creative force of evolution (p. 117).

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## Mindful Age

Before discussing Haridas Chaudhuri's pioneering vision of integral education, we will consider the contemporary context that it foreshadowed by briefly looking at the *Mindful Age* in general and its emerging role in higher education in particular.

In 2011, Barry Boyce, Senior Editor at *The Shambhala Sun*, published a collection of essays by prominent scholars and teachers of contemplative practice including Pema Chodron, Daniel Goleman, Tich Nhat Hanh, Jack Kornfield, and Jon Kabat-Zinn. He entitled his collection by identifying it with the contemporary age, *The Mindfulness Revolution* (Boyce, 2011).

In the first essay, Jan Chozen Bays, physician, co-abbot of the Great Vow Zen Monastery, simply defines "mindfulness" as follows: "Mindfulness means deliberately paying attention, being fully aware of what is happening both inside yourself—in your body, heart, and mind—and outside yourself in your environment. Mindfulness is awareness without judgment or criticism"(Chozen Bays as quoted in Boyce, 2011, p. 3). This straight-forward definition is representative as it matches closely if not identically with every definition of mindfulness that I can find. Also, in the literature on the subject, "mindfulness," "meditation," and "contemplative practice," are often used synonymously. However, I should note that these terms are not synonymous in various traditions.

In his introduction to the collection, Boyce convincingly argues that "The Mindfulness Revolution" accurately and fairly describes our age, especially when we consider the extent and depth of the impact of mindfulness on nearly every aspect of personal and professional life. Boyce correctly asserts the relationship between meditation and action:

The mindfulness revolution begins with the simple act of paying attention to our breath, body, and thoughts, but clearly it can go very far. It helps us in our home life, with our family, friends, and colleagues. It helps us in our business, our voluntary groups, our churches, our communities, and in our Society at large. It's a small thing. We all can do it. And it can change the world. (Boyce, 2011, p. xviii)

To see the presence of the mindfulness revolution in the corporate world, one simply has to read *Search Inside Yourself* by Chade-Meng Tan ("Meng" as he is known), longtime product and thought leader at Google. Over the past ten years, he has not only introduced the benefits of mindfulness to the employees at Google, but his work has been adopted by many high tech corporations. In *Search Inside Yourself* with its far reaching subtitle of *The Unexpected Path to Achieve Success, Happiness (And World Peace)*, Meng (Tan, 2012) draws on the work of Mirabai Bush, the founder of the Center of the Contemplative Mind in Society, and Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society at University of Massachusetts School of Medicine as well as the founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic (also, he is an honorary doctorate degree recipient of CIIS). I note the affiliations of Bush and Kabat-Zinn to emphasize the extraordinarily broad reach of the interest in mindfulness.

Meng points out that “Our approach to cultivating emotional intelligence begins with mindfulness”(Tan, 2012, p. 25). He draws on a universal theme among teachers and practitioners of contemplative practice as he claims:

The process starts with an intention. Start by creating an intention, a reason for wanting to abide in mindfulness. Perhaps it is to reduce stress. Perhaps it is to increase your well being. Maybe you want to cultivate your emotional intelligence for fun and profit. Or maybe you just want to create the conditions for world peace, or something. (Meng, 2012, p. 35)

Commenting on Meng’s book, Daniel Goleman, the principal scholar of emotional intelligence, notes Meng’s “brilliant insight” in realizing “that knowing yourself lies at the core of emotional intelligence, and the best mental app for this can be found in the mind training method called mindfulness” (Goleman quoted in Tan, 2012, p. viii). Jon Kabat-Zinn writes in the forward to the book that Meng’s approach will help people not only know themselves better, but also relate better to others. Kabat-Zinn fully supports Meng’s claim that mindfulness can transform the world.

In the corporate community, the growing interest in mindfulness is not confined to high-tech companies. An article in the *Financial Times* by David Gelles (2012) entitled “The Mind Business: Yoga, meditation, mindfulness”...reports that some of the west’s biggest companies are embracing eastern spirituality as a path that can lead to bigger profits.” Gelles reported on mindfulness programs at General Mills in Minneapolis, and he profiles and quotes Janice Marturano, deputy general counsel at General Mills, who claims the many benefits of mindfulness practice: she states, “It’s about training our minds to be more focused, to see with clarity and to have space for creativity” (Marturano quoted in Gelles, 2012, p.2).

As in the corporate world, there has been an extraordinary increase of contemplative practice and study on college and university campuses. Alexander Astin, Helen Astin, and Jennifer Linholm in their book *Cultivating the Spirit* (Astin, Astin, & Linholm, 2011), define meditation as including “a family of spiritual/contemplative or psychophysical methods and practices that while considerably diverse in approach, share as a common theme or goal: the discovery of a deeper realm of experience or awareness beyond the ordinary discursive (thinking) mind”(pp.148-49). Like Haridas Chaudhuri, they recognize the need for meditation in higher education: “Our findings also show that providing students with more opportunities to touch base with their ‘inner selves’ will facilitate growth in their academic and leadership skills, contribute to their intellectual self-esteem and psychological well being and enhance their satisfaction with the college experience”( p.157).

## **Haridas Chaudhuri’s Vision of Integral Education**

Let us now turn our attention to Haridas Chaudhuri and his groundbreaking work at CIAS (California Institute of Asian Studies—former name of CIIS) in integrating meditation into higher education. In 1974, a year before his death, Chaudhuri published an essay in the journal *New Thought* entitled “Education for the Whole Person” in which he summed up his philosophy of education and articulated his founding mission of CIIS. As he so often did throughout his

writings, Chaudhuri offered in the 1960's and 70's a glimpse of the future as he outlined a role that meditation could and should play in higher education as well as in professional and personal life. Nearly a half century ago, he knew what many higher education leaders are discovering today—that higher education is enhanced significantly by the theory and practice of meditation.

Chaudhuri recognized that ...

There is a growing realization today that human personality is a multifaceted and multidimensional phenomenon. No scheme of education can therefore be worth its name without a well rounded program for balanced personality growth of the human individual. [A person] is neither all intellect nor all emotion; neither all intuition nor all reason; neither all body nor all spirit; neither all outward behavior nor all inward vision. Personal integration of all these closely interrelated functions is the ultimate goal in the [human] evolutionary process.... (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 50)

He acknowledged that educators faced a challenging task:

The concept of integral or holistic education does no doubt pose a serious challenge to all those responsible for curricular development in educational institutions. It imposes a new responsibility of serious proportions upon all teachers and educators with sincere dedication. (Chaudhuri, 1974, p. 51)

To achieve “a well rounded program for balanced personality growth of the human individual,” Chaudhuri proposed an integral education—an education that, among other distinguishing characteristics, balanced meditation and action.

Soon after his arrival in San Francisco in 1951, Chaudhuri and his wife Bina created the Cultural Integration Fellowship where he taught classes and workshops on meditation. In addition, he taught courses on meditation at the American Academy of Asian Studies (a predecessor of CIIS) as part of the required curriculum for all students. In addition to teaching meditation, Chaudhuri wrote extensively on the subject: for example, he wrote a book based on his teachings at the Cultural Integration Fellowship, *Philosophy of Meditation* (Chaudhuri, 1965b); he wrote a lengthy chapter, “Meditating for Self-Perfection,” in his book *Mastering the Problems of Living* (Chaudhuri, 1968). In all his works, he encouraged the practice of meditation not only for its own sake but also for an integral education—an education that he envisioned could lead to a “balanced life.”

In this “Meditating for Self-Perfection,” Chaudhuri defined meditation as follows:

Meditation is the art of deeper self-awareness. It aims at the awareness of the self on subtle levels of personality. It culminates in the realization of the inmost center of one's own being. In realizing his inmost center of being, the individual attains self-fulfillment by transcending the fetters of the ego. He is released from the prison of egocentricity. He discovers the transcendental dimension of his existence which unites him with all other individuals. (Chaudhuri, 1968, p. 158)

Please note the similarity of his definition to those of others that I have cited.

In his definition, Chaudhuri focused on personal transformation, social change, self-awareness, ego transcendence, and transpersonal union. To exemplify his definition, he added:

The Buddha in the posture of meditation is the perfect picture of the extroverted introvert. Meditation is the ingoing movement of consciousness. It explores the inner regions of the mind with a view toward self-integration and the eventual discovery of the non-temporal dimension. (Chaudhuri, 1968, p. 160)

To Haridas Chaudhuri, meditation was not in any way set apart from human action; rather, he insisted that meditation informed action. He held that "...meditation culminates in universal compassion" (Chaudhuri, 1968, p. 160). Moreover, he claimed that "Intelligent communion with one's depth of being and loving communication with the outside world supplement each other in illuminated living" (p. 160). He also linked meditation to spirituality as he believed that in prayer, a person could talk to the Divine; but in meditation, he believed the divine could talk to the person.

Chaudhuri thought of meditation in cosmic terms:

Meditation is an all out search for the ultimate truth. It is a search for the truth about oneself and one's relationship to the universe.... Fixed ideas and unconscious intellectual assumptions are the last impediments to the unclouded vision of truth. (Chaudhuri, 1968, p.163)

He believed that reflection separated rational thinking and emotion. He noted, however, that "meditation aims at eliminating all discrepancies between intellect and emotion, between reason and passion. It opens channels of communication between the conscious mind and the unconscious psyche" (p. 165). He added: "While reflection is a function of the intellect, meditation is an integrative movement of consciousness, a function of the total self" (p. 165).

In 1974, Chaudhuri invited Dr. Rina Sircar to join the faculty to expand the teaching and practice of mindfulness at CIAS. Prof. Sircar was educated in Burma, both in the Theravada Buddhist monastic tradition—where the practice of mindfulness meditation was integrated in her teaching—and was also present in the mainstream setting of higher education at Rangoon University. When Rina Sircar began teaching at CIAS, she would hold a meditation session each morning. In the beginning no one came to her sessions, because no one knew what mindfulness meditation was. But sitting there alone she thought to herself, "Never mind, they will come." During the next 37 years that she taught meditation—both in the classroom and in retreats—students and non-students did come, and her efforts melded with those of other spiritual teachers who helped shape and advance the "Mindful Age" in which we live.

## Neuroscience

Chaudhuri's vision of an education that integrated meditation and action is as relevant today as it was 45 years ago. While the mindfulness movement of our age continues to draw on ancient

wisdom traditions including those that Chaudhuri studied and practiced throughout his life, the neuroscientists in their current breakthrough research are defining the benefits that mindfulness can have on human action. Unquestionably, neuroscience is an emerging field of the current moment, and it is a field that Chaudhuri recognized would have significant potential judging by the early developments in the study of the brain that he was aware of in the 1960's and early 1970s. In short, neuroscientists are confirming Chaudhuri's thesis of the interrelationship of meditation and behavior. Neuroscientific research supports the notion that through meditation, one can change the structure of one's brain and consequently change one's perspectives and actions.

UCLA professor, Daniel Siegel, and a growing cohort of neuroscientists claim that "one of the key practical lessons of modern neuroscience is that the power to direct our attention has within it the power to shape our brains [neural] firing patterns, as well as the power to shape the architecture of the brain itself" (Siegel, 2010, p. 39). Siegel notes that "*Neuroplasticity* is the term [that describes] this capacity for creating new neural connections and growing new neurons in response to experience" (Siegel, 2010, p. 5). He explains that "Mindfulness [the aspect of mindfulness of most interest to him] is a kind of focused attention that allows us to see the inner workings of our own minds" (p. ix). According to Siegel, mindfulness "...helps us to be aware of our mental processes without being swept away by them, enables us to get ourselves off the autopilot of ingrained behaviors and habitual responses, and moves us beyond the reactive emotional hoops we all have a tendency to get trapped in" (Siegel, 2010, pp. ix-x). He adds that "Our understanding of mindfulness can build on these studies of interpersonal attunement and the self-regulatory functions of focused attention in suggesting that mindful awareness is a form of intrapersonal attunement" (Siegel, 2007, p. xiv). Siegel concludes that "...relationships are woven into the fabric of our interior world." and "We come to know our own minds through our interactions with others" (Siegel, 2010, p. 63).

Rick Hanson in his best-selling *Buddha's Brain*, points out that "What happens in your mind changes your brain, both temporarily and in long lasting ways; neurons that fire together wire together" (Hanson, 2009, p.18). Hanson's research indicates that "Small positive actions everyday will add to large changes over time, as you gradually build new neural structures" (p. 19). Throughout *Buddha's Brain*, he provides specific exercises that will gradually change our attitudes and behaviors.

Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman (2009), professors of neuroscience at the University of Pennsylvania, have published the results of their studies of the contemplative practices of members of religious groups drawing upon their respective faith and wisdom traditions: for example, Franciscan nuns in Philadelphia engaged in "centering prayer." In their *How God Changes Your Brain*, they report the results of their measuring brain waves of religious practitioners while in meditative states. Similarly, Marion Beauregard and Denyse O'Leary (2008) in their book, *The Spiritual Brain*, document their research on meditation with Carmelite nuns in Montreal. In most, if not all, cases, there is a shift in brain wave activity during a variety of forms of contemplative practice.

## Conclusion

In February 2013 CIIS co-sponsored the Wisdom 2.0 Conference in San Francisco—a conference devoted to exploring the intersections of spirituality, mindfulness, neuroscience, education, and technology. CIIS Sages Jon Kabat-Zinn, Jack Kornfield, and Joan Halifax shared center stage with the founders and CEOs of leading social media corporations including Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. In many and various ways, CIIS has contributed and continues to contribute significantly to the *Mindfulness Revolution* of our age. As one participated at Wisdom 2.0 in the heartfelt conversation about the connections of mindfulness to compassion, personal life balance, organizational leadership, and community service, one could sense the presence of CIIS where, mindfulness is part of the curriculum in many programs. For example, in the Community Mental Health Program, one can take a course in Mindfulness Therapy; and in the Public Programs and Performances, one can take a certificate program in Mindfulness and Compassion in Psychotherapy.

Forty five years later, we express our gratitude to Haridas Chaudhuri for a vision of integral education that linked meditation to action. In his view, it was an education for the whole person. Today, there are growing numbers of educators who are integrating meditation into higher education in order to prepare their students to cultivate the knowledge and practice of mindfulness among all areas their professional and personal lives.

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