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## Contemplative practices tree

Before becoming a licensed professional counselor, I had a rather limited understanding of the term "mindfulness". It was associated with social media influencers journaling on white sand beaches at sunset, and it seemed too vague or specific to bother exploring. However, taking a class on the subject in graduate school opened my eyes to its rich history and accessibility. I soon realized that mindfulness isn't exclusive to beach settings or celebrities; it's a practice that can be engaged with by anyone, anywhere. From a therapist's perspective, when we discuss mindfulness, what exactly do we mean? Jon Kabat-Zinn defines it as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally". Although this sounds simple enough, integrating mindfulness into daily life can be challenging. To make practices more accessible, The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society offers The Tree of Contemplative Practices, which divides mindfulness into 7 branches. These branches include stillness (quieting the mind), generative (loving kindness and compassion meditation), creative (music and singing), active (activism, work, and volunteering), relational (deep listening), movement (yoga and dance), and ritual/cyclical (establishing a sacred space). The Tree also has two core tenets: connection with something greater than yourself and awareness of yourself, others, and the world around you. Personally, I appreciate the creative, movement, and stillness branches. Journaling is one of my go-to mindfulness practices, as it aligns well with my theoretical orientation of narrative therapy. As a narrative therapist, I believe everyone has a unique story worth sharing, and mindfulness can help individuals tap into their life experiences. The Power of The Tree: A Journey of Mindfulness The concept of mindfulness can be a powerful tool for understanding our place in the world and cultivating inner peace. The Movement Branch offers physically engaging options like walking meditations that allow us to explore our surroundings, while the Stillness Branch provides avenues for quieting the mind and embracing the present moment. The Tree of Contemplative Practices is a comprehensive framework that encompasses various branches, each designed to foster awareness and connection with the divine or inner wisdom. The Generative Branch involves activities like prayers, visualizations, and chanting, aiming to cultivate feelings of compassion and devotion. In contrast, Creative Practices facilitate contemplative experiences through arts and expression, connecting us with nature's cycles. Regardless of which branch we choose, The Tree encourages us to lead with curiosity, exploring our interests and selecting practices that resonate with us. By embracing this diversity, we can tailor our mindfulness practice to suit our unique needs. As Maia Duerr notes, The Tree should be seen as a "living organism" in constant evolution, reflecting the idea that mindfulness is a dynamic process of growth and self-discovery. Contemplative Practices harmonize mindfulness with action, highlighting its profound impact on societal engagement. Relational Practices cultivate a mindful presence when interacting with others and the world. Stillness Practices aim to quiet the mind and body for tranquility and focus. Movement Practices promote mindfulness through physical activity, while the Tree of Contemplative Practices offers a personalized journey of mindfulness for individuals. This evergreen guide nurtures inner peace, transcending location or tradition. A downloadable version of the Tree is available for personalization, allowing users to incorporate their own traditions or practices, or for educational purposes with students creating a collective chart of practices. Any daily activity, no matter how ordinary, can be considered a contemplative practice if done with mindfulness and intention, such as cultivating awareness while gardening or eating. The tree's design by Maia Duerr and illustration by Carrie Bergman for C-MIND highlights the different categories of practices, including Stillness Practices that quiet the mind and body, and Generative Practices that generate thoughts and feelings of devotion and compassion. Although classifications are not definitive, and some practices may overlap, this framework encourages exploration of the breadth of meditation and mindfulness within various traditions. As Mirabai Bush pointed out, the Tree of Contemplative Practices serves as a starting point for imagination and creativity in incorporating contemplative disciplines into daily life. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society emphasizes that the roots of the tree represent the foundation of all contemplative practices, which transcend differences between various traditions and allow for inclusion of new secular practices. The concept of mindfulness was once foreign to me, conjuring images of social media influencers journaling on a beach at sunset. However, after taking a class in graduate school, I gained a new understanding of its accessibility and versatility. Mindfulness has been practiced for thousands of years and can be engaged with by anyone, anywhere. Mindfulness is not just for hippies; it's an essential tool for anyone seeking a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world. By embracing writing as a mindfulness practice, individuals can tap into their unique story and find inner peace. The Movement Branch offers physical activities like walking meditations to connect with nature, while the Stillness Branch provides quiet time for introspection and self-reflection. To begin, cultivate curiosity and explore the various branches of The Tree, which allows users to tailor practices to their needs. As noted by Maia Duerr, a key creator of The Tree, it should be viewed as a living organism that evolves over time, offering a profound impact on one's mindfulness journey. I worked at the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society in Northampton, MA, where our mission is to integrate mindfulness into daily life to create a more just and compassionate society. I was hired in 2002 to direct the "Contemplative Net" project, which mapped contemplative practice and identified its use outside traditional religious contexts. It was my dream job, allowing me to combine my background as a qualitative researcher with my passion for Buddhism and meditation. The interviews were fascinating, featuring people from diverse spiritual traditions like Buddhist, Christian, and Islam. One common theme emerged: the importance of adapting mindfulness practices to meet individuals where they are. A story shared by Soren Gordhamer highlighted this point. He worked with a young man in prison who didn't participate actively in meditation or yoga but would always greet him warmly after class. It dawned on Gordhamer that his presence created a safe space for compassion and acceptance, making it more crucial than the actual practice itself. As I reflected on creative adaptations of practice, an image of a tree emerged, with each branch representing a grouping of contemplative practices mentioned by the interviewees. For instance, "Stillness Practices" focused on calming the mind and body, while "Generative Practices" aimed to cultivate qualities like devotion or compassion. Other branches, such as Creative, Activist, Relational, Movement, and Ritual, took shape based on stories from the interviewees. At the tree's base, two roots symbolized the common thread among these diverse practices: Connection (with oneself, others, nature, or a higher power) and Awareness. The team at the Center welcomed this concept with enthusiasm. Artist Carrie Bergman transformed it into a beautiful visual representation, dubbing it the "Tree of Contemplative Practices." This image was later included in the project's report. Years later, I revisited the Tree while designing workshops on incorporating mindfulness into daily life and work. To my surprise, one planner had already been using it with their staff, finding it a valuable tool for understanding the various forms contemplative practices can take. The Tree prioritizes intention over form, allowing individuals to explore different branches and find practices that suit their needs and personality. As one participant noted, "The revelation was not just about sitting meditation; choosing a different branch helped me discover a practice that truly worked for me." Another expressed gratitude for the Tree's expansion of understanding: "It made me realize that any activity can be contemplative when done mindfully." The Tree also encourages creativity, and in workshops, participants create their own versions to reflect their personal connections. A definitive taxonomy may not be necessary; instead, an exploration of what contemplative practice means to each individual is encouraged. A woman shared her experience of adding a branch for "Food Meditation," which involves mindfulness during meal preparation, helping her shift away from a habit of rushing while working on film sets. This sparked a realization about the importance of mixing in walking and writing practices into daily routines to maintain balance. The author's goal for the Tree is to liberate people from narrow notions of contemplative practice, allowing individuals to discover their unique practices. By embracing this approach, one can integrate meditation into life more effectively, leading to increased equanimity, joy, resilience, and compassion. The concept of "Hugging" could be added to the Relational branch of the Tree, highlighting the importance of physical touch in fostering connections. Maia has been helping people find their ideal practice since a long time, from 2008 to 2014, she was in charge of the Buddhist Chaplaincy Training Program at Upaya Zen Center and got the ordination as a lay chaplain from Roshi Joan Halifax in 2012. She is very happy when she can help people on their spiritual path, also creating amazing learning experiences.