

Chapter 14

Mindfulness Through Mantram and Inspired Passage Meditation: Toolkit for Diversity

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ABSTRACT

Mindfulness is sometimes misunderstood as solely a Buddhist or secular practice. This chapter offers a toolkit for enhanced sensitivity and flexibility toward patients and populations of diverse spiritual and religious orientations and backgrounds. It explains a set of eight interrelated practices known as Passage Meditation (PM), and a subset known as the Mantram Repetition Program (MRP), both derived from Indian-born spiritual teacher Eknath Easwaran (1910-1999). These practices support mindfulness and can be pursued within any major religious tradition or outside all and facilitate drawing on spiritual resources within each tradition. Two empirical research programs based on these practices have generated more than 30 published research studies and seven randomized controlled trials. Each program has documented both enhanced mindfulness and a variety of improved mental health outcomes, often mediated by mindfulness gains. Guidance is provided for implementation, implications for diversity-related ethical obligations, and needed expansion of contemporary mindfulness toolkits.

INTRODUCTION

Interventions based on “mindfulness” have become popular in health and human service settings in the United States, Britain, and many other countries in the western world and beyond. Such interventions have been used for purposes that include stress reduction among patients, family therapy, treatment of depression and anxiety, treatment of substance abuse, and enhancement of education in settings ranging from college to grade-school (Ivtzan, 2019; Oman, 2020).

In these interventions, mindfulness is often presented as derived from Buddhism. Analogous practices and skills, however, have been taught for centuries or millennia across all of the world’s major religious traditions. As expressed in Singh’s (2010) inaugural editorial that launched the journal *Mindfulness*, “mindfulness is ubiquitous in all wisdom traditions... and there is much to be learned from these traditions” (p. 2). Yet practical efforts to draw on non-Buddhist forms of mindfulness appear overdue. Professional literatures are now seeing increasing calls for developing and implementing mindfulness interventions that are less neglectful and more proactively sensitive to recipients’ pre-existing spiritual and religious views and engagement (e.g., Palitsky & Kaplan, 2021). Similarly, greater attention to indigenous and spiritual perspectives on mindfulness-related contemplative practices has been advocated in prominent venues (Oman, 2020; Walsh & Shapiro 2006).

This chapter offers immediate assistance to health and human service professionals for expanding their mindfulness toolkit to provide enhanced sensitivity and flexibility toward patients and populations from diverse spiritual and religious orientations and backgrounds, both non-western and western. For an alternative approach to mindfulness intervention, we explain a set of eight inter-related practices, collectively often called passage meditation (PM), and a subset of these practices called the Mantram Repetition Program (MRP). Both are derived from the work of Indian-born spiritual teacher Eknath Easwaran (1910-1999). These practices support mindfulness and can be pursued within any major religious tradition or outside of them all, and facilitate drawing on spiritual resources within each tradition. Two empirical research programs based on these practices have generated more than 30 published research studies and seven randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Each of these two research programs has documented both enhanced mindfulness and a variety of improved mental health outcomes, often mediated by mindfulness gains.

The following sections explain the eight practices as originally formulated, and then review theory and research on how each adapted program incorporates mindfulness and affects health and other outcomes of interest. The final two sections discuss implementation, implications for diversity-related ethical obligations, and contributions to needed expansion of contemporary mindfulness toolkits.

PASSAGE MEDITATION APPROACHES: OVERVIEW

Figure 1¹ summarizes the eight practices that constitute the formal method taught by Eknath Easwaran, now often referred to as Passage Meditation (PM). The full PM program has been used and studied as an intervention for stress management, skill-enhancement, and educational purposes, and appears suitable for certain clinical applications. Suitable for an even broader range of clinical and non-clinical applications is the Mantram Repetition Program (MRP), based on three of the points (indicated by asterisks in Figure 1). The MRP has been the focus of ongoing research led by Dr. Jill Bormann at the US Veterans

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