

A Preliminary Inquiry on Rosen Method and Mindfulness: What We Notice

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Abstract

This article is an initial exploration of the perceptions of a group of Rosen Method bodywork practitioners and movement teachers about the relationship between mindfulness and Rosen Method. The authors are three members of the editorial board of the Rosen Method International Journal who embarked on this investigation with the intention of exploring how Rosen Method practitioners and movement teachers view mindfulness and Rosen Method, and how mindfulness-centered training and practice may serve as a resource for Rosen professionals. This inquiry used semi-structured telephone interviews with 13 Rosen Method professionals in the United States. The interviews were conducted to identify if and how, in the opinion of these Rosen professionals, mindfulness practices provide a resource for personal and professional development in the practice of Rosen Method bodywork and movement.

Through our introductory, informal exploration we found that mindfulness-based trainings and practices have served as valuable resources for personal and professional development for these practitioners and movement teachers. Additional questions of interest also emerged. Given the extensive research on mindfulness applications in several health professions and the availability of training programs in mindfulness for professional development, the authors hope to further explore this topic in the future, using interviews and focus group discussions with a wider range of practitioners from around the globe in order to provide additional insights. We hope this article will stimulate dialogue in the international

Rosen community about ways in which we might explore the intersection between mindfulness and Rosen Method bodywork and movement.

Introduction

In the past few decades, “mindfulness” has almost become a household term, at least in the United States. While the concept has been understood for centuries in eastern philosophies, the term became popular in the United States through the work of John Kabat Zinn who, in the 1980’s, integrated meditation and yoga in an outpatient program for people with chronic illnesses (e.g., chronic pain) for whom traditional allopathic medicine had little to offer. Since then, there has been an increasing body of literature on mindfulness, and many health and allied health professions now participate in mindfulness education or training as part of their continuing education for professional development.

Given the growing interest in mindfulness in health care professions, the authors of this article were curious about how Rosen Method practitioners and movement teachers view mindfulness in relation to their work. In the literature available on Rosen Method bodywork and movement, parallels have been made between mindfulness meditation and the experience of Rosen Method. In an earlier article that appeared in this Journal, Dina Kushnir describes the synergistic value of meditation and Rosen Method bodywork for the practitioner (Kushnir, 2008) and articulates parallels between mindfulness and Rosen Method in their shared views of the centrality of the body and the breath, the similarities of intentional concentration, and the significance of non-judgment and kindness. She endorses both practices, as they inform each other and serve to enhance self-awareness, compassion, and full presence in our lives.

The connection between Rosen Method and mindfulness in the literature is also found in Alan Fogel’s book, *Body Sense: The Science and Practice of Embodied Self-Awareness*. In his book, the concept of embodied self-awareness resembles mindfulness. Fogel describes mindfulness as a form of “embodied meditation” and describes Rosen Method bodywork as employing a listening touch which helps the receiver become more aware of moment-by-moment bodily sensations, thoughts and feelings, in an atmosphere of acceptance and non-judgment (Fogel, 2013).

As “mindfulness” has become a more frequently studied approach in the United States, researchers from multiple disciplines -- including psychology, neuroscience, and education, for example -- have identified numerous useful applications of this ancient practice. Physician Daniel Siegel (2007) notes that, “mindfulness in its most general sense is about waking up from a life on automatic pilot, and being sensitive to novelty in our everyday experiences.” Others applying mindfulness in various clinical settings have described it as “a process that involves moving toward a state in which one is fully observant of external and internal stimuli in the present moment, and open to accepting (rather than attempting to change or judge) the current situation” (Hayes, Follette & Linehan, 2004).

For centuries, direct experience of the present moment has been an integral part of many faith traditions including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Taoism (Armstrong, 1993; Goleman, 1988; Nhat Hahn, 1991; Kornfield, 1993). In recent decades, mindfulness has become an important concept in western psychology (Bishop et al, 2004; Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007), in learning theory (Langer, 2005) and in new psychotherapy approaches, such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (Hayes, 2004; Linehan, 1993; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2013). As referenced above, John Kabat-Zinn developed the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) intervention, which has been shown to benefit participants with physical and psychological difficulties and

to generally improve quality of life (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Many of the recent clinical applications of the practice of mindfulness meditation that have grown out of the various spiritual traditions have been examined with regard to how mindfulness might be applied across a range of clinical situations. There has been a surge in neuroscience research in the last few decades showing that the brain is an organ of great plasticity with the capacity to change and learn throughout the life span (Siegel, 2007). This research confirms that there are neurological changes associated with meditation and underscores the value of mindfulness practices (Siegel, 2007). Mindfulness not only affects the brain, but also influences thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Siegel, 2010). Mindfulness research points to how mindfulness can be used in therapeutic interventions (Piet & Hougaard, 2011; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2013).

What is Mindfulness?

The practice of mindfulness involves entering a state characterized by open and interested awareness of *what is, in the moment, without judgment or elaborative thinking* (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness training involves didactic elements, but relies most heavily on experiential learning (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2013). Bishop et al. (2004) proposed a definition for mindfulness as follows: *a process of awareness involving sustained attention, the ability to volitionally switch attention, the inhibition of secondary elaborative processing, and an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance*. Kabat-Zinn's definition remains useful: Mindfulness is *"paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding experience moment by moment"* (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145).

According to the scientific and psychological literature on mindfulness, there are many ways to enter a mindful state of awareness, including meditative approaches involving sitting, standing, walking, and yoga (Bishop et al., 2004; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In her work and books, *Mindfulness* (1989), *The Power of Mindful Learning and On Becoming an Artist* (2005), Ellen Langer compares mindlessness with the unconscious. She suggests that humans, as a way to avoid pain, do not see certain things when not motivated to do so. When we numb consciousness to cope with pain, we are unable to be fully present, and as a result we miss out on seeing, hearing or tasting the life we have. Mindful activities of various kinds, including artistic activity, can help engage awareness with the whole of life and transform life into a more meaningful experience.

Another element of mindfulness that is discussed in the literature is expanded awareness and focusing. Psychologist Daniel Goleman indicates that there is an expansive form of awareness and attention that is restorative. He describes this type of focusing through a broader and more relaxed use of attention. He notes that we can "switch from effortful attention where the mind needs to suppress distractions to letting go and allowing our attention to be captured by whatever presents itself" (Goleman, 2013, p. 56). Activities that are creative such as art, dance, and music can allow this state to emerge by simply allowing the mind to be a part of the playfulness of art or the open observation of music. When we concentrate fully on something that is relaxing, we become immersed in the experience. We can relax in a way that opens us to possibilities for new understandings, creative thoughts, and novel solutions. Examples of the immersive, relaxed experiences might include wandering in nature, engaging in art, or experiencing music. Goleman also notes that this immersed relaxation starts to happen when we gently arouse the sensory systems. What helps to quiet the inner dialog with ourselves is total, positive absorption. This seems to happen in Rosen Method with the gentle introduction of the sensory stimulation of touch and movement.

Method of Inquiry

Our intent with this inquiry was to conduct exploratory interviews with practitioners of Rosen Method bodywork and movement teachers who we understood had some background in mindfulness and/or related awareness practices. We chose to interview both experienced practitioners and movement teachers to provide an initial understanding of how practitioners of each of these aspects of Rosen Method have worked with mindfulness practices. We wished to examine our set of interview protocol questions so that we could refine them for a future, formal study with a larger sample of Rosen Method professionals.

To recruit interviewees, we contacted Rosen Method practitioners and movement teachers whom we knew personally, who were recommended to us by others, or whose description in the North American Rosen Method Professional Association's Directory included the word "mindfulness." We attempted to identify a select sample of practitioners with a range of diverse experiences in mindfulness training for this preliminary inquiry and to include some who had more extensive mindfulness involvement than others.

We interviewed a total of thirteen Rosen Method bodywork practitioners. Six of them were also identified as movement teachers, eleven were female and two were male practitioners. Each of these Rosen professionals had at least 10 years of practice experience, and over half had 15 to 20 years of experience. All of the interviewees had participated in at least one form of meditation training or awareness practice that foster mindfulness, including yoga, authentic movement, martial arts, or artistic practices. Nearly all of the interviewees had been involved with a mindfulness meditation experience for many years – they were not beginning students of mindfulness. Several had started their exploration through yoga training and continue that affiliation. Most had explored various religious and spiritual practices such as Buddhism (including Tibetan, Zen and Vipassana traditions), Sufism, Christianity, and mindfulness to nature and through the arts. Some had studied meditation in various traditions for over 40 years and most had studied Insight Meditation or Vipassana, and other forms of Zen meditation for over 20 years.

There was a range of experience with daily mindfulness practices. Those who had extensive study of mindfulness and related meditation practices indicated that they incorporated daily or frequent meditation into their lives. For half of our interviewees, mindfulness meditation was their central spiritual practice. Other interviewees had participated in mindfulness and related meditation training for several years. Six of the interviewees had leadership or teaching roles within a meditation group and also led regular meditation or yoga classes. A few had studied and practiced Mindfulness Meditation or Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in part for professional development for their other non-Rosen work in related health and allied health fields. Although a few had studied mindfulness as a form of professional development, most found that mindfulness was a central aspect of their overall personal practice and philosophy of life.

Interviews were conducted by telephone and, in some cases, some of the interviewees responded to the questions in writing through email correspondence. This group of interviewees had multiple professional identities, including work in health-related professions, art, and business. This informal, preliminary inquiry involved a small select number of interviewees. We chose not to share the identity of our interviewees and to share a broad description of what we learned.

We developed a semi-structured discussion protocol as a general guide for our interviews and our questions were derived from the following content areas:

- In what ways did the practitioner explore mindfulness? How long had they studied this or related

approaches? How might they articulate a definition of mindfulness? What aspects of mindfulness training seem most useful for a Rosen Method bodywork practitioner and/or movement teacher?

- How is mindfulness included in Rosen Method work? How does it influence the hands-on aspect of practice or the choice of language used?
- What information and resources are beneficial in the learning, study and practice of mindfulness that the interviewee felt comfortable sharing with others?
- How has mindfulness helped the interviewee individually or in their work with clients (including information on how frequently they practice or attend training on mindfulness)?

What We Learned from Practitioners about Mindfulness and Rosen Method

In the following descriptions, the authors have chosen to share the interviewees' comments in a collective manner without attributing them to specific individuals. Many of these practitioners expressed similar ideas. A synthesis of their responses is provided.

Definitions of Mindfulness

We first interviewed the practitioners about their definition of mindfulness. One participant described mindfulness as a “bio-psycho-social-spiritual” process, encompassing one’s whole experience. Other definitions included: “Mindfulness is a felt experience and can be hard to put into words.” “Mindfulness is a day-to-day, moment-by-moment experience of being aware.” Practitioners described it as integral to their lives, “infusing one’s life on a daily basis”, and “a way of being in life” which is not a technique, but “a part of who I am”. Mindfulness was described as part of “a wholesome lifestyle that unifies my spiritual life and my everyday life.” Another shared that “mindfulness is integral to who I am and how I practice everything.” Mindfulness was also seen as a “present moment awareness, the capacity to know what is going on, what is happening as it is happening.” Mindfulness is “not an object to pull out of a tool box but a way of being, part of who I am in my life.”

Presence

According to the experiences of the practitioners interviewed in this inquiry, presence is central to mindfulness. Mindfulness was often noted as a process to strengthen focused attention. This applies to Rosen Method bodywork and movement where we are trained to be present to what is there. The ability to be present with another person is one of the many criteria that is necessary for an intern to become certified. Several of the participants reflected on witnessing Marion Rosen’s presence during a Rosen session as “palpable.” Another participant noted: “I think our clients can feel in our hands when we are fully present, and that is what allows them to drop in and be present with themselves.” Often when describing mindfulness, participants used the word “presence.” One participant described both mindfulness and presence as “deep” experiences: “I think I have become a better Rosen practitioner since I started doing more yoga and meditation ... the more presence we can offer in a session; the deeper the client can go.”

Descriptions of presence included being in the moment, holding ideas about the client lightly and staying open to who the client is, in the “now” moment. Some participants closely linked the terms “awareness” and “presence.” One interviewee summed it up like this: “everything I do is about awareness and focus.” When observing her own presence, one participant noticed her “whole body dropping into receptivity and everything dropping away; mind chatter dissolves, an emotional resonance is felt, and I am just right there.”

One participant described how presence during Rosen Method movement creates a possibility for “feeling the movement from the core of your being ... when movement is taught from that place of possibility, often tears will come up, and the movement can go very deep into the body... [touching] deeply held places the same way the bodywork has.” Presence can catalyze transformation.

Mindfulness and Thought

Practitioners described their thought processes during mindfulness practices and Rosen sessions. Some participants described the ways in which they guide their attention back to mindfulness by turning attention inward toward bodily sensations; they might notice their breathing or the contact that their feet make with the floor. The breath and the body were described as “anchors” tethering the practitioner’s awareness and bringing them back to the present moment when thoughts would stray. When the mind becomes busy or distracted, one participant uses the practice of “sacred pauses” taught by Tara Brach (2003) to guide herself back to the moment. This brief mindfulness practice refocuses awareness on the moment and on the possibility of softening into loving kindness. The practitioner described including the client in this mindful pause. For example, in a session when the practitioner observes the client is “getting away from themselves,” the practitioner gently coaches the client back into the moment-by-moment experience of the here and now by using words such as “can you feel yourself on the table?” or asking the self-critical client if there might be “a possibility to feel compassion?” One participant noted that the content of the mind is considered a “passing show, something to observe and allow to simply float by.” “It is a sense that a part of me steps back and is observing rather than being caught up in the content of thoughts or emotions.”

As specified by one practitioner, although mindfulness may be experienced as “quieter” than other states of mind, mindfulness is not a passive state. Indeed, the mind is relatively active with expanded attention to all aspects of experience. For example, some participants described how they respond when encountering their own distress while working with a client (such as urges to “fix” something, or difficulty staying present with painful emotions or during an apparent lack of response). Some offered that they use anchoring methods to mindfully make room for these experiences. Anchoring to the body includes self-cueing thoughts such as “feel your feet, drop deeper here, come back to your hands, and breathe.” Some participants offered that they might recite a centering mantra to bring their awareness back to the present moment with the client.

Mindfulness and Feelings

Several of the interviewees noted how mindfulness helped them to acquire greater equanimity; this supported them in feeling more capable of being with their emotions as well as the emotions of their clients. One practitioner noted that Rosen Method “provided excellent training for handling emotions in a unique, non-efforting way” and that this “helps her to keep her heart in a tender place.” In her opinion, her Rosen Method training provided “more intimate support for being with emotional states.”

Mindfulness facilitates change and allows us to soften our rigidness and allows the unconscious to emerge. Without mindfulness, unconscious upwelling of emotion can provoke reactions that increase suffering or harmful acting out. On the other hand, the mindful emergence of unconscious material can become an opportunity for growth, understanding, healing, and transformation. Another participant offered that “mindfulness can support change by allowing us to accept mixed feelings.” She described how mindfulness helped her reconcile mixed and conflicting feelings she had about a loss. The expanded and

permissive experience of mindfulness makes it possible to be bigger than our experience, and “rather than trying to push something away, mindfulness allows you to expand your being and to encompass mixed and apparently contradictory feelings.”

Several participants described how they had learned to be mindful through encounters with life’s unique challenges. Their own suffering compelled them to explore themselves and their circumstances. They were drawn to mindfulness endeavors such as meditation and Rosen Method in order to “explore themselves.” Rosen Method supported them in “waking up” and living in a more congruent and aware way.

Mindfulness and the Body

Some of the practitioners described how Rosen Method bodywork and movement served as a resource to expand and deepen awareness in the body. One practitioner noted that some bodywork clients (who are also long-time meditators) find that receiving Rosen Method bodywork is useful to expand their capacity for being fully present in the body. Walking meditation and movement therapies and dance were mentioned as excellent body-centered awareness-enhancing resources. Rosen Method movement teachers expressed the usefulness of other movement approaches, such as Authentic Movement, as awareness practices that can provide an active meditation where movement is part of a spiritual practice.

Participants described a felt sense of their experiences of mindfulness through their body. Mindfulness “includes the tissues; it is a lived experience in the body.” One practitioner described how, when distracted, she ushers her awareness back by “checking in with my body” and reminding herself to “feel your feet, breath and relax your jaw.” The practitioner added, “I’ll come back and feel myself.” Mindfulness to the body is particularly useful when the practitioner is struggling in some way during a session. For example, the practitioner may begin to observe a sense of frustration when “wanting to fix” for the client, or when having the thought that “we’re not getting anywhere.” At such moments, “I really come back to my hands ... [noting that] I have to drop deeper here” and bringing intention “to feel my heart open for this person.”

Rosen Method bodywork and movement training includes learning to listen to the information arising within one’s own body while working with a client. We also observe these bodily experiences while observing sessions during Rosen training. One participant reflected on times when witnessing sessions in which she observed changes in her own body sensations during the session, including a felt sense of “something building”; an anticipation or “expectation” would arise when “something important” was about to unfold for the client. In the midst of the apparent quiescence of the session, energy was building. The participant described feeling an upwelling of emotion and tears when the issue surfaced and the client seemed to be “getting what was needed” during the session.

Practitioners discussed the coming and going of awareness during a session and how they return to the body, in the moment, as a way to stay present. Comments included: “Thoughts, emotions, images, and sensations come and go all the time” and, “mindfulness in a session includes noticing when presence wanders and using intention to bring our presence back to the moment with the client.” This can be a “rhythmic” process and is not static or linear. In a wavelike way, “presence oscillates,” and “it is through intention that we come back to presence.” Another shared that “to be fully present for another person means gently returning over and over to awareness of my own body and breath” and, “I find that ‘gentle returning’ essential to both and yoga training most useful in a Rosen Method bodywork session.”

Discernment

Within the mindfulness descriptions, practitioners also referenced discernment arising from mindfulness. Unlike judgment (which carries a quality of rejection), discernment is responsive rather than reactive. Practitioners described how thoughts, emotions, or images might arise in the course of a bodywork session. These thoughts or images would be allowed to hover without the practitioner necessarily responding to them immediately. The practitioner would make room for these experiences and discern whether the content was from their own experience or whether the content might relate somehow to the client and therefore be useful to share in some way. The mindfulness process alive within the practitioner allows a kind of “attunement” through which the practitioner can better discern what to bring forth into a session, with a word or a touch. Several practitioners described the “responsiveness” of the work. The aware presence of the practitioner allows the practitioner to discern, often at the level of the body, in an intuitive manner, and to respond with great sensitivity to the client.

One participant shared an example of this expanded awareness during mindfulness practice: “Sometimes, from a place of deep letting go, an image, a word, a phrase, or a tune will come up, and be instantly seen as a clue to how my life is unfolding. This same mysterious process can also happen when I’m giving a Rosen Method bodywork session, although there I might use the image, word or tune as a clue to what’s going on with my client”. This “clue” hints at “a truth I might miss seeing, and it will often guide me.” The practitioner described letting this intuitive content “float over us” while working in silence and waiting “to see if it feels appropriate to mention aloud.” Voicing such an observation requires mindfulness and discernment to sense whether the content is one’s own or about the client. While it can feel risky and daring for practitioners to voice these intuitive observations, “often the intuition is spot-on and takes the whole session to a new level.”

Gentleness, Loving Kindness and Compassion

Many of the participants shared that loving-kindness was part of their mindfulness practice and training. The word “gentleness” reflects on the loving kindness aspect of mindfulness. Several interviewees used this term to describe Rosen Method bodywork. One participant noted that it is “rare to be treated gently” and in a “gentle, mindful, and present way.” She offered that “the gentleness [of Rosen Method] is a big part of what touches people,” and it is “rare in today’s world to have someone pay that much attention to you for that much time, it is actually kind of amazing.” One practitioner recalled the “gentleness” of Marion’s work while observing a session. The gentleness of the work involves “paying very close attention to where the client is, and responding to the little shifts and changes that we notice.”

Some spoke about loving kindness as integral to mindfulness. They described the importance of kindness toward self and others, and how kindness toward others is really dependent upon one’s capacity to be kind toward oneself. One participant commented about meditation and Rosen Method and offered that “all the work you do on yourself as a practitioner becomes part of how you are with others, and in [your] life.”

Insight about self-compassion was mentioned by several of the participants. One person spoke of a moment while listening to Pema Chodron when she experienced sudden relief and a release of tension as Pema described how we “cannot be mindful all the time”. Intellectually, we know that no state of mind is perpetual, yet we often carry expectations that we should aspire to be mindful all the time. The practitioner described a body sense of easing and “relief” that represented a real letting go of a harsh self-expectation followed by a dropping in to the experience of self-acceptance.

Another person described being on a meditation retreat and noticing judgments about experiences

that were arising from within. She shared this struggle with the meditation teacher who suggested that she might *allow* the reality of her experience – that perhaps the experience was exactly what was needed. With that invitation, the practitioner felt an upwelling of compassion within her body. The body, rather than the reasoning of the mind, was opening to the possibility of self-acceptance in a new way. This participant shared that it is only through a deep sense of accepting our own previously-rejected parts that we can fully accept our clients and hold the space for them to accept themselves.

Another person who self-identifies primarily as a movement teacher indicated that one element of mindfulness that nourishes her is the sense of community that grows out of practicing a loving-kindness meditation. This has strengthened her capacity to be present to her clients. Others shared this same sentiment indicating that for those who are not located in an area replete with multiple Rosen Method resources (almost anywhere outside of California) very often a meditation community can provide the type of community that will affirm the development of loving kindness.

Mindfulness and Rosen Method

This group of Rosen Method bodywork and movement practitioners who also had backgrounds in meditation found many connections between the two practices. Practitioners described how “awareness is central” and “Rosen Method is an extension of my spiritual practice; it is an application of what I feel and believe - being present and awake and curious to life.” As Dina Kushnir noted in her article, “both Rosen Method and mindfulness meditation cultivate a calm, accepting, non-judgmental, compassionate, and spacious awareness and presence” (Kushnir, 2008, p. 11). One interviewee stated: “both meditation training and Rosen Method helped me unlearn a tendency to *do* rather than just *be*.” For those who described mindfulness meditation as a spiritual pathway, mindfulness is the overarching lens of perception in their lives, and Rosen Method is a form of right livelihood that offers an awareness that is supportive for clients. One interviewee reflected that “studying mindfulness meditation deepened my trust in just being, without *doing*” and another shared that “in yoga, it is a matter of showing up fully, being totally present, doing your best and letting go of the attachment to results and I find that helpful in Rosen as well.”

Mindfulness was seen by several in this group as a requisite for practicing Rosen Method. Many of the interviewees stated that they believed the bodywork could not be done without a mindfully aware practitioner: “You can’t really do the work without mindfulness and presence.” Several interviewees described coming to Rosen Method after embarking on a mindfulness practice through other practices: “I came to Rosen Method bodywork as a person who had a strong trust in mindfulness as a spiritual path, and my mindful awareness informs and orients my perception and orientation to everything.” One interviewee reflected that Rosen movement is incomplete without mindfulness: “You can go through the movements like a puppet or you can go through the movements where you are really embodying and feeling them”. Participants reported that studying other mindfulness disciplines deepened their Rosen Method work.

Participants described a reciprocal and synergistic relationship between meditation and Rosen Method. One participant shared that similarities are such that “at times I can’t differentiate about whether this is something I learned in meditation or something I learned in my Rosen Method training” and, “I was attracted to Rosen Method because to me, it is like practicing mindfulness at the table.” Similarly, Rosen Method movement was described as “meditation in action”. One practitioner noted that “mindfulness is when I show up at the Rosen table; it is being present and always coming back to the body, to the hands, to being aware within your body because you are modeling this presence for the client.”

Some interviewees reflected on the shared purposes of meditation and Rosen Method bodywork - to support focus, to enhance awareness, to connect with the truth, and to alleviate suffering. A few participants felt that a Rosen Method bodywork session is like two people in a shared and focused meditative state. Another person echoed this with: "I personally think of Rosen Method as mindfulness, with touch incorporated. I often think of it as a dual meditation of what is true for the person who comes for the bodywork. The touch helps the person contact parts of themselves in a very mindful manner." One interviewee commented that "mindfulness of touch allows me to explore the unique configuration of each client's body with soft hands, inquiring and listening, to deepen the contact and feeling of connection, and to meet the person I'm touching just the way they are in each new moment". Another stated that "mindfulness meditation is my lens for perceiving the world with loving kindness" and "the more completely mindful I can be, slowed down and quiet inside, the greater chance my client will be able to relax and be in their body with a deepening awareness of who they really are."

Several participants agreed that they teach mindfulness indirectly in a Rosen Method bodywork session, such as when the practitioner coaches the client back to sensing the body. Rosen Method is an educational process that does not always involve verbal teaching; it is experiential and bodily. One practitioner spoke of a client who, after receiving sessions over time, now "feels his body change" as he "comes towards my office." Another example of learning is when a client on the table notices that, "Oh, there wasn't any response in my body to that, was there?"

For participants in this preliminary exploration, mindfulness and Rosen Method share many similarities. Rosen Method and mindfulness both have a purpose of alleviating suffering. Another similarity is that "both meditation teachers and Rosen Method practitioners act as supportive guides to expanded awareness." While benefits of the two activities seem to be similar, so are some of the challenges. For example, practitioners noted that when engaged in either mindfulness or Rosen Method, a person can become focused on practicing the "right way" and become "drawn into efforting." Although most participants noted many similarities between mindfulness and Rosen Method, one interviewee noted a difference: "I have found Rosen Method bodywork to be more direct and more personal [than meditation] in terms of the feedback provided to the client about their body-awareness." Based on the responses of this small sample of practitioner opinions, the relationship between mindfulness and Rosen Method appears to be significant. Further investigation is needed to understand this relationship more clearly.

Community and Devotion to a Mindfulness Practice

Many of those interviewed found that mindfulness related to the development of a sense of community and concern for the world at large. The discussion of mindfulness went beyond the individual session or movement classroom to include how mindfulness can inspire us to work on behalf of communities. Participants described their mindfulness practices in various extended communities, including their non-Rosen Method work settings and interactions, their work on diversity teams, or their efforts on behalf of the global Rosen Method community. One practitioner described how the Rosen community can use mindfulness as we work together to raise the consciousness of the whole community about our values and goals. By bringing awareness and mindfulness into our communities, we can use those qualities to hold our assumptions and interpretations lightly. Mindfulness to our relationships in community can help us refrain from hurtful reactions and help us discern what is important to share for the greater good. We can respond with kindness and caring to ourselves as well as others.

Several participants talked about the importance of community in sustaining their personal mindfulness

practices and their Rosen work. For many, maintaining devotion to a practice was an important part of their daily or weekly life as indicated in responses such as: “yes, regular practice is essential. If I am not aiming to be as clear and grounded as possible within myself, in touch with what is true for me, be it via yoga, journal writing, meditation, [or] contemplation on soulful reading materials, then I cannot be there for anyone else”, and “yes, I practice regularly, nearly daily, and mindfulness gathers a wholesome state of mind that [leads] to liberation.” One practitioner commented that mindfulness is “infused in all of life, [with] no division between spiritual life and everyday life”. Further, “mindfulness brings a focus and expanded attention to my Rosen Method practice, to dance, and supports me in feeling the whole room. I find I join in a sitting practice several times a week to be in community, and also find that several movement practices, like Authentic Movement and Rosen Method movement provide support for my awareness.”

For several individuals, studying or practicing mindfulness provided what could be considered a professional development resource through continuing education. In many health and allied health professions in which continuing education is required (including nurses, psychotherapists, acupuncturists, massage therapists, etc.) mindfulness trainings are accepted as part of professional development and continuing education credit. The Rosen practitioners we interviewed who live far from Rosen training centers, indicated that practicing mindfulness is useful when ongoing support from the Rosen community is not available: “In my area there is very little opportunity for local weekly Rosen support, and I find the awareness training or mindfulness training that is available can provide a resource for me” and “practicing with others is a way for me to have contact and connection with others who understand the importance of mindful awareness. It offers me support.” At least two people noted that meditation teachers were good role models for talking, listening, and responding to emotions. These practitioners observed their meditation teachers as able to “just be with someone and allow the strong feeling to be present and not try to change it, not try to analyze it ... just be present. This was a wonderful way to have a good role model.”

Discussion

This inquiry with Rosen Method practitioners proved a rich discussion and revealed some insights about mindfulness practices and Rosen Method. The information will be useful in developing a larger conversation, and suggests a number of additional questions that can be incorporated into a more formal level of investigation in the future.

The authors found that there were multiple types of mindfulness learning that this group had pursued, most through meditation training in spiritual traditions and some through continuing education. All revealed that ongoing mindfulness practice and trainings help deepen their skillfulness as Rosen practitioners. They found benefit from mindfulness whether it was introduced before Rosen training, during Rosen training as an adjunct study, or in continuing education coursework. This particular group of experienced Rosen professionals (who were also well-trained in mindfulness) reported that mindfulness is essential to Rosen Method bodywork and movement and that learning mindfulness supported their work in Rosen Method. For those who came to Rosen Method after development of a mindfulness practice, there was a compelling sense that they “fell in love” with how Rosen Method is an embodied mindfulness practice. Several felt that Rosen Method was the missing link to deepening personal direct experience of embodiment. This sentiment was voiced by movement teachers and bodywork practitioners alike.

The purpose of our investigation was to explore the opinions of practitioners about Rosen Method and mindfulness and to understand more about the relationship between these two endeavors. This topic deserves further investigation. For example, we interviewed both bodywork practitioners and movement

teachers with the same interview protocol, but in a future, larger, and more formal study, questions could also address differences that may exist between these two types of Rosen professionals.

For the interviewees with decades of mindfulness practice, mindfulness guides them into a deeper understanding and expanded awareness; they experience a greater capacity to work with sustained attention and presence when practicing Rosen Method. We wonder if mindfulness practices can be a useful adjunct to Rosen students in their early years of training, before one has a decade of mindfulness practice.

For most participants in this inquiry, the study and incorporation of mindfulness meditation practices into their daily lives was strongly established before they began Rosen training and is embraced as a spiritual practice; hence, it is often perceived as a strong aspect of the person, and is not an “add-on technique” or something that is only activated or practiced during meditation or Rosen Method. Mindfulness infuses and informs their lives on a daily basis. These practitioners described feeling that Rosen fit with what they already knew and easily embraced who they were. Given their comments, additional questions arise. Do other Rosen practitioners who have not been exposed to mindfulness and who do not embrace it as a spiritual practice learn similar aspects of Rosen in other ways? What approaches are used to strengthen these aspects of learning Rosen Method? Would more entry level Rosen Method students and practitioners find training in mindfulness useful? How might meditation training fit within continuing education for Rosen Method bodywork and movement practitioners?

Each of the individuals we interviewed has a secondary training or business pursuit in addition to Rosen. We are curious about how Rosen Method bodywork practitioners bring their various professional “selves” and perspectives to the Rosen table. For example, how is the work of a Rosen Method meditation teacher different than a Rosen Method social worker or a Rosen Method acupuncturist, Rosen Method nurse, or Rosen Method movement or yoga teacher? Such questions may be attractive subject matter for future inquiry.

The authors look forward to further exploration of the potential for understanding how mindfulness practice, as a learned process, might be a useful and important skill-building asset and continuing education resource for Rosen Method students, interns, practitioners and teachers. The authors of this article are aware that there are many Rosen Method practitioners with mindfulness practices and we hope that this article will stimulate an engaging dialogue about mindfulness ... within ourselves, in our work with clients, and in our greater international Rosen Method community.

We thank the practitioners who volunteered their time and thoughtful responses during our interviews and for allowing us to quote in this collective way. Dialoguing across geographic distances is a challenge and one of the ways we can exchange ideas is through this Journal. We hope this article will be one of many ongoing discussions about important topics in our work and community. If you are inspired by this article, you may want to follow up by having a discussion with practitioners near you or writing a commentary in response, or a related article, for the Journal. We invite Rosen Method Institute members to consider writing articles of value to our community.

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Resources

If you are interested in learning more about mindfulness approaches used in somatic therapies and counseling settings, here are some useful links. Please feel free to forward us any articles or links you may have as well. The authors hope to continue a further exploration of these issues with a future email survey to other Rosen Method practitioners around the globe.

www.insightmeditationcenter.org

Insight Meditation Community of Washington at www.imcw.org

www.meditationandpsychotherapy.org

www.dharmaseed.org

www.mindfulness-solution.com

www.dharma.org