

Meeting of the Mindful



ALI AND ATMAN SMITH and Andres Gonzales work in the Druid Hill area in Baltimore's inner city. Through the Holistic Life Foundation, they teach yoga and reach at-risk children through hip-hop, dance, basketball, tutoring, organic gardening—whatever works. But on the first weekend of October, they were at the New York Society for Ethical Culture headquarters on Central Park West to take part in the Creating a Mindful Society gathering—the first-ever conference devoted exclusively to how mindfulness is being applied across a broad spectrum of our society.

At the end of their presentation, Atman Smith reported on the progress of their first twenty students, a group they started working with nearly a decade ago. “We had the toughest cases in the school,” he said. “We’ve continued to work with them over the years and now they help us with the program. All of them graduated from high school. Nineteen of them are working or in college. None are incarcerated.” The audience rose in unison, applauding and cheering.

More than 500 people gathered on

September 30 and October 1 for the conference—sponsored by The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society; the Omega Institute; Mindful.org; and Sounds True—and

another 5,000 registered to take part through live streaming. It began on a Friday night with a keynote address by Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.

The next day, Richie Davidson, director of the Center for Investigating Healthy Minds, talked about the evidence of mindfulness' effectiveness. Janice Marturano, who recently created the Institute for Mindful Leadership, reported on how valuable it has been for leaders to synchronize their hearts and minds through mindfulness. Morning sessions focused on health and healing, what mindfulness means, and how mind-body practices are being used in schools and colleges, while the afternoon featured field reports from pioneers working in law, personal and organizational finance, the workplace, the military, and the inner city. The conference wrapped

Left: Jenny Lykken, Ali and Atman Smith. Right: Town hall panel: Congressman Tim Ryan, Richie Davidson, Janice Marturano, Jon Kabat-Zinn, and moderator Tami Simon.



Tara Healey of Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, teaching mindfulness practice.



up that night with a town hall in which participants explored how to bring mindfulness and related practices into their lives and communities.

Saki Santorelli, director of the Center for Mindfulness, got things going Friday night by declaring that “the time has come... for practice, discipline, turning inward, so that we can find the capacity to act in the world in new ways.”

Kabat-Zinn then emphasized that, in the face of the world’s

The field reports began with Rhonda Magee, professor of law at the University of San Francisco, who talked about how she had gradually brought

more and more elements of mindfulness into the curriculum. Kristi Nelson, director of resource development and community relations at the Center for Mindfulness, suggested that the practice can help

us align our money habits with our deepest values. Jenny Lykken, of Google, reported on a variety of programs at her company that promote emotional intelligence and mindfulness. Ali and Atman Smith outlined their program for at-risk youth. And finally, retired Army Captain Elizabeth Stanley talked about how the program she started, Mindfulness-Based Mind Fitness Training, has been teaching soldiers and marines how to increase their mind-body awareness while on duty.

Congressman Tim Ryan posed some timely questions during his talk: Is slowing down, paying a little more attention, and being kinder a radical agenda for America? Who can argue with those values?

Videos of the conference, including guided meditations, keynote addresses, field reports, and the town hall, are available free at live.soundstrue.com. ♦



Saki Santorelli opening the conference on September 30. Right: Jon Kabat-Zinn and Richie Davidson.

many troubles, mindfulness is not a quick fix, but it does offer ways to find a deeper experience of our minds and hearts. And this deeper experience can influence society at all levels and in many ways. “Seeds are being planted by many people,” he said, “people who are on fire with dedication and enthusiasm to live authentically and share that with others. The seeds will grow into something much larger.”

