

Prof. Jon Kabat-Zinn - Letter of Support

Dear Dr. Holas and Participants at the Conference on Practical Applications of Buddhism in Western Psychology: Greetings. First of all, I thank you for the opportunity to address this opening session in this way. I am sorry not to be able to attend this conference and participate with you in person. I am thrilled that the newly formed Polish Mindfulness Association is hosting this important scientific gathering. It certainly seems to be a sign of growing interest in bringing the streams of Western psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, and medicine together with the stream of dharma in its most universal manifestation. What is arising from this convergence when it is maximally authentic on both sides is nothing less than astonishing. The potential for healing, transformation, and liberation from suffering, as I am sure you all realize, is enormous. It seems to be happening all over the world. That makes your meeting even more timely. How wonderful that it is happening in Warsaw, and that it is bringing people together from all over the world, and particularly, from the countries of Eastern Europe. I will make only two observations, one about the pace at which the field is growing; the other about the spirit of mindfulness practice itself, and its grounding in first-person experience and in regular and systematic cultivation (bhavana). First, if you plot the number of scientific papers with the word mindfulness in the title, you will find that in the past eight years, it seems to be growing exponentially (Figure 1, Ludwig and Kabat-Zinn, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 2009). This phenomenon has profound implications which we should all ponder carefully so that the dharma dimension does not get obliterated, denatured, or trivialized in the growing rush to claim that one is an active participant in this increasingly attractive field. Personal practice has to be the ground of this work, on both the clinical side and the research side, if one hopes to understand, study, and apply the full orthogonal dimensionality of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, 2005). More and more, I find myself reminding people that mindfulness is a practice, and not merely a good idea or a useful concept. I would imagine that, given the theme of this conference and the range of presenters, this might be one element of the conversation about moving the field forward with integrity and authenticity. Since you have a number of superb Buddhist scholars giving keynote presentations, there is a wonderful opportunity for those new to mindfulness to learn something of its origins and the remarkable traditions that have kept it alive, enriched it, and nurtured it over the past twenty six hundred years. Secondly, let us remember that mindfulness is a way of being, not merely a technique. The following passage is something that I wrote years ago for the Stress Reduction Clinic's patient brochure, in an attempt to give people who were being referred to MBSR a taste of what we might mean by mindfulness as a way of being. Oprah Winfrey saw it in *Coming to Our Senses* and read it aloud on her radio program last July. I share this with you solely to give you a sense of how much these mindfulness-based practices are finding their way into the mainstream in American society. Have you ever had the experience of stopping so completely, of being in your body so completely, of being in your life so completely, that what you knew and what you didn't know, and the way things are right now no longer held even the slightest hint of anxiety or discord? It would be a moment of complete presence, beyond striving, beyond mere acceptance, beyond the desire to escape or fix anything or plunge ahead, a moment of pure being no longer in time, a moment of pure seeing, pure feeling, a moment in which life simply is, and that "isness" grabs you by all your senses, all your memories, by your very genes, by your loves, and welcomes you home. I send special hellos to my friends and colleagues, Andy Olendzki, Antonia Sumbundu, Alex Berzin, and Linda Lehrhaupt. I wish you all a seminal and very fruitful conference. May its benefits reverberate far and wide in both space and time, and contribute to greater compassion and wisdom, and healing and transformation for all sentient beings and for the planet itself.

Jon Kabat-Zinn Professor of Medicine emeritus
University of Massachusetts Medical School
Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society

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from left: Ajahn Amero, Richard Davidson, Mathieu Ricard, Jon Kabat-Zinn