



## **Dr. Christopher Germer Presents “Inside the Buddhist Mind: Lessons for Western Psychotherapy”**

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Modern science and Buddhist meditation practice have much in common, according to Dr. Christopher Germer, clinical psychologist in private practice in Arlington, MA.

During his April 19, 2007 lecture at the Café Scientifique in Bozeman, Dr. Germer discussed how Western science relies on objective, third-person observations, whereas meditation uses subjective, first-person inquiry. Both approaches require that the investigator sticks to the facts, humbly accepts mistakes, and holds his or her concepts lightly.

“Mindfulness,” said Dr. Germer, “is at the heart of Buddhist psychology. It refers to simple awareness of what is happening in the present moment.” A revolution is underway in scientifically-based psychotherapy which says, “Awareness and acceptance first, change second.” “We’re learning to stop fixing and start caring for ourselves, and that’s a difference that’s making all the difference.”

Mindfulness-based techniques are currently used to alleviate difficult-to-treat conditions such as recurrent depression, suicidal behavior, chronic pain, and even psychotic delusions. Dr. Germer himself specializes in mindfulness-oriented treatment of anxiety and panic. He is on the Board and faculty of the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy, and he’s a Clinical Instructor in Psychology at Harvard Medical School.

“We’re on a hedonic treadmill,” Dr. Germer told a packed house at Ferraro’s Fine Italian Restaurant. “By always running after pleasure and trying to avoid pain, we are exhausting ourselves and drifting further and further from one another. The mindful alternative is to settle down, appreciate what’s around us, and learn to tolerate—perhaps even to embrace—the inevitable discomforts of life. Fortunately, mindfulness is a skill that can be learned.”

Dr. Germer treated the audience to lessons in meditation, as well as to cutting-edge research on how training the mind can change the brain. The brain can change for the better with as little as 30 minutes of mindfulness meditation per day— increased attention, compassion, and a general sense of well-being. Studies with monks who have meditated over 35,000 hours demonstrated remarkable changes on both EEG and fMRI scans (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging uses MRI to measure responses related to neural activity in the brain).



In Dr. Germer's most recent book, *Mindfulness and Psychotherapy*, (edited by Germer, Ronald D. Siegel, and Paul R. Fulton, 2005), he writes:

Most people in psychotherapy are preoccupied with past or future events. For example, people who are depressed often feel regret, sadness, or guilt about the past, and people who are anxious fear the future. Suffering seems to increase as we stray from the present moment. As our attention gets absorbed in mental activity and we begin to daydream, un-aware that we are indeed daydreaming, our daily lives can become a nightmare. Some of our patients feel as if they are stuck in a movie theater, watching the same upsetting movie their whole lives, unable to leave. Mindfulness can help us to step out of our conditioning and see things freshly.

The event was co-sponsored by Montana INBRE and MSU College of Letters and Science.