

Wake Up!

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I've spent some time in the last year thinking through [what](#) I wanted my life to look like. This culminated recently with an aspiration to immerse myself within mindfulness practice and teaching, without quite knowing how I was going to do so. Well, the universe has responded, and I'd like to share its latest manifestation.

I recently finished a 3-week university tour with a cheerful group of monks, nuns and lay friends (see above for proof!) The monastics are students of Thich Nhat Hanh, one of the most respected and well-known Zen masters alive today. We visited almost a dozen schools on the east coast, putting on free 'mindfulness workshops' which included instructions on various meditations (sitting, walking, eating) as well as panel discussions and Q&A sessions. The events were well-attended and in total we shared space with over 1,000 young adults. Living, working and traveling with monastics outside a retreat setting was an incredible experience, and allowed me to learn each day. A few big takeaways:

Waking up I smile

a brand new day is before me...

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Even a little mindfulness goes a long way. The workshops ranged from 1hr-6hrs, and many students walked in the door with little prior exposure to mindful practice...but by the end of each event, it was as if we were sitting with a different group of people. To close many events we had students share their experience of the day, and each time I was nourished so deeply by their insights. After walking meditation, a friend at Harvard said she had walked through the main campus hundreds of times, but for the first time really noticed how radiant and stable nature was, and pledged to carry this appreciation with her. After a deep relaxation meditation at Brown, a friend glowingly shared (while grinning from ear to ear) that his mind always races but today he achieved a calm mind & body while somehow being fully awake and alert. After eating meditation at Dartmouth, a friend explained how she had struggled with eating disorders for years, and that today she took the time to really listen to what her body did and didn't need.

Balancing doing and being will be a life-long practice. Coming from the corporate world, I am accustomed to a top-down, fast-paced & heavily structured decision making process. The monastic community operates bottom-up, in a very organic and non-hierarchical way. Where the corporate world seeks productivity the monastic community seeks harmony. Both productivity & harmony are important, and it was my job to seek both. My role on the tour was a type of organizational management, and I was frequently dancing the line between getting things done and allowing things to be. Between taking on tasks myself and asking others for help. Between sharing and listening. Between talking and silence. Between reading and meditating. Between grit and grace.

The value of community. A close friend of mine recently published an [article](#) about mentorship and triathlons. His emphasis was that while training has the potential to be an extremely individualized experience, when asked about the sport, most athletes commented on the strong sense of community. I think the same can be said about practicing mindfulness (just swap the 4am bike ride for sitting meditation!). To my friends that don't regularly practice mindfulness, it may seem like I am removing myself in some self-serving way to follow my breath. To my friends that do practice, that same act is actually one of compassion, and is me tapping into something much greater than my self. While each person's breath is his/her own, the practice is rooted in the notion that we are all in this together, and that our goal as practitioners is peace not just for ourselves, but for all beings.

This environment facilitated many insights for me, insights that I'll be unpacking over the weeks and months to come. I'd like to share one with you here: *If you wait until you have everything 'figured out' to be happy and at peace with your life, you're going to be waiting a miserably long time.* Paradoxically, the more I am at peace with where I'm currently at, the more favorable conditions seem to manifest for me. I can only speak from personal experience here, and I encourage you to see where this attitude can take you.

Want to learn more about the tour? At each event we handed out a small booklet which had, in words, the essence of our mindfulness practice. It was recently [posted online](#); flip it open and you'll see a welcome note by yours truly :-)