

Bio

Nathan Jishin Michon recently completed his PhD at Graduate Theological Union. He was based at Tohoku University for Fulbright research into the formation of Japanese Buddhist chaplaincy programs. Among other works, he is co-author of the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion's entry on "Buddhist Chaplaincy."

Title

Mindful Breath Coaching: Development of a Contemporary Shingon Therapy

Abstract

The "mindfulness movement" has spread around the world, even within cultures that practiced it for centuries and melded both with secular establishments and traditional religious practices, creating new synchronistic practices. One of those is a form of mindful breathing used alternately with reflective listening and counseling within therapeutic appointments. The Shingon priest Ōshita Daien is a profoundly influential figure in the field of "spiritual care" in Japan, having authored a dozen books, initiated a chaplaincy training program, a clinical meditation therapy program, and various contemplative therapies within Japanese hospitals and hospices. Within those programs, one technique he uses is a type of personal coaching accompanied by mindful breathing. However, he also occasionally accompanies the breathing with chanting and instruction in visualizations. A professional certification in music therapy helped him gain legitimacy within public hospitals before he further developed these techniques within training programs for doctors, nurses, chaplains, social workers, and others. One of Ōshita's students, another Shingon priest named Takayama Seiei, took these methods and developed them in his own ways within the "Heart Recuperation Center" that he established at his temple. Both priests access traditional Shingon healing practices known as *kaji kitō* within their therapies, but Takayama's use is far more common and overt.

Both these priests also use language and reference from the modern western mindfulness movement. For example, they both regularly use the modern Japanese word "maindofurunesu" far more than any traditional Japanese term for the word and make regular reference to contemporary scientific studies on the subject. This presentation will first describe the background of the practice as done by two Shingon priests and the Shingon influences upon their individual styles before also exploring the intriguing socio-cultural impacts of syncretism and secularism on such practices.