



RETREAT REVIEW

MINDFULNESS RETREAT WITH JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN & SHARON SALZBERG

BY MARGARET VAN

When I found out Joseph Goldstein and Sharon Salzberg, two teachers who brought mindfulness to the English-speaking world, were paired to teach at a retreat, I leapt for joy! I had listened to most of Joseph's recordings and yearned to see him in person. Rumours Joseph was on the verge of retiring made me even more determined to go and I signed up for the three-night retreat in New York.

The retreat "Experiencing Insight & Love", was predictably over-subscribed. There were about 200 of us but thanks to the sprawling grounds and lofty heights of Garrison Institute (an ex-seminary for Catholic Capuchin monks) in Garrison, New York, space never felt like an issue. Accommodations were simple yet comfortable. Food was impressively fresh and delicious, with a creative vegetarian repertoire that delighted the palate as we ate in silence.

Joseph and Sharon's experience was apparent; they presented a programme that was accessible to beginners and engaging for

seasoned practitioners. Over three days they took us through the basics of what mindfulness is and is not. Teaching from the heart, they began every session with a talk sprinkled with personal anecdotes followed by various forms of lightly guided meditation: mindfulness of breath, mindfulness of thought, open awareness and loving kindness meditation.

Even though these practices were not new to me, Joseph and Sharon's impeccable teamwork, complementary styles and pedagogies were filled with wisdom and insight, making everything worth learning anew. Their humour reminded participants not to take the practice too seriously, tickling participants in the right places for them to realize everyone partook in the highs and lows of life's journeys. For me it was the perfect opportunity to revisit and refine the practice. The following are some notes to share.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

It is being here with whatever is here, in a different way. There is a spacious sense of possibility, rather than being locked in. It is about being able to be with emotions, making space and being creative in responding to them.

It is about creating a pivot, just when an action is about to provoke us. Instead of reacting, we pause to ask: "How am I relating to my experience right now?"

It arises from these conditions:
-previous moments of mindfulness which act as a filter to strengthen our trust in the process.
-a quality of perception that recognizes what's happening with wholesome attitudes. This recognition comes in the form of our first noting (no need to deliberate on noting).

It is living in the present both internally and externally and being in the moment with a non-reactive mind. It is about becoming curious about every experience, including an uneasy mind, rather than drowning in it.

Mindfulness is universally applicable. It allows us to see deeply into the nature of life, including change.

We are 100% responsible for our mind. Abiding happiness resides in it.



Garrison meditation hall