

Meditation for Professional Development and Sustenance

by Nelly Kaufer, LPC

According to the research these days meditation and mindfulness can heal most physical and psychological wounds. From high blood pressure, to anxiety... from heart disease to depression, meditation seems to be the treatment of choice. And research seems to substantiate its efficacy with diverse populations... from children to prisoners... from addicts in early recovery to people with life threatening illness. As mental health providers we can add our profession to the list of populations where meditation is of benefit. Why is this?

Meditation addresses some of the basic imbalances in our culture. We are overstimulated. Life is changing at a rapid pace with the demands to keep up. There seem to be an infinite number of things to learn and track: no one seems to have enough time.

As mental health professionals we face countless demands. We track the complex inner worlds of our clients while trying to keep up with changing treatment approaches. Some of us face challenges working in mental health agencies, the demands for productivity coupled with the stress of interpersonal conflict. Or in private practice we might be overwhelmed with keeping our business thriving while meeting insurance company demands. And we are poised for huge changes in our healthcare system and the inevitable impact on our profession.

Mindfulness meditation, as it is commonly taught, guides us to an internal state of mind that is simpler and so less stressful. Whatever the suggested object of meditation... be it the breath or a mantra/ repeated set of words, or a body scan.. when the mind stabilizes on the object of meditation we get a reprieve from the demands of our life, a mini vacation. Vacations are great, but we return home after vacations to the stress of our daily lives. After meditation we must return home to our complex, demanding lives.

I have been a meditation teacher and a psychotherapist for decades. I teach Recollective Awareness Meditation, a psychologically sophisticated process of meditation, reflection and recollection where you can learn from whatever occurs in meditation. It is an introspective approach to meditation which includes the benefits of mindfulness while expanding the range of awareness. Through practicing this approach to meditation, awareness will naturally infuse your life and inform your clinical work.

In Recollective Awareness Meditation we allow our mind to wander freely in meditation rather than demanding that it settle on a meditative object. We will, at times, easily settle into quiet and calm. At other times the stress and upset in our life is part of the meditation, but rather than turning away from it we can gain insight into it. In meditation we learn to think about our lives with more intelligence, creativity and discernment. Many people never try to meditate or quit because they they can't turn off their thoughts. What a relief to welcome thinking into meditation!

Meditation has benefited me in a myriad ways. At times it has been a quiet, secluded place; a relief from the emotional demands of client interactions and interventions. At other times I deeply contemplate what went on in a therapy session, giving my emotional reactions free reign, thereby getting a glimpse of my countertransference and uncovering personal issues that interlace with the client's distress. And sometimes I provide myself sage "self supervision" that gives me direction in my next session with this client. These are just a few of the professional benefits I have experienced.

Do you meditate? If so what are your reasons? How else do you sustain yourself so that you remain engaged in your work and with your clients? We do such important work; it is essential that we get the support we need to remain compassionate and understanding with clients and to prevent our burn out.