

The Ethical Meditating Therapist

Whether you already meditate or wish you would and feel guilty that you don't-- as a therapist these days, meditation is likely a consideration. This was quite different not that long ago. At my internship at San Francisco Hospital in 1989 it was just fine to be "out" as a lesbian, while I carefully hid that I was a Buddhist meditation teacher.

There are many different kinds of meditation, each with their own processes and benefits, as well as side effects. Perhaps what they have in common is an increased ability to be settled with inner experiences. A more unstructured form of meditation or therapy follows the interests, direction and inclinations of the client or meditator. Recollective Awareness Meditation is founded on a kind of trust born of experience-- that caring, attentive listening will reveal what needs to be known and explored. Positive growth will occur in unpredictable way.

Research has proven that meditation has many benefits and therapists reap additional professional advantages. Sophie Davis-Cohen, a meditation student that I trained and who is now a meditation teacher, completed a qualitative study of Recollective Awareness Meditation (RAM) for her master's degree thesis last year. "RAM encourages a meditator to know and tolerate one's inner world; this study suggests it is highly protective for therapists, whose jobs entail effectively working with others' pain, thoughts, and emotions... This study's major findings show RAM offered therapists in the study a powerful process of self-care with many significant benefits."

What does meditation have to do with ethical development, and how, as therapists striving for ethical conduct, can we harness this? Again, this depends on how we meditate, though all Buddhist meditation is deeply rooted in ethics; when we act with ethical integrity our minds tend to more easily settle and our inner worlds are more peaceful. The highest level of ethical development entails grappling with internal values and complex issues rather than adhering to rules or "being good".

In Recollective Awareness Meditation we allow whatever occurs in our inner worlds to naturally unfold. This means we allow thinking and emotions, even about uncomfortable or difficult subjects such as ethical dilemmas. I teach continuing education workshops where Recollective Awareness Meditation becomes the doorway through which we explore the complex ethical demands of our work.

As a mental health professional it is natural to encourage clients to allow and explore their thoughts and feelings, but I wonder if you fully allow your own thoughts and emotions when you meditate? Meditation can be a time to connect with and "hold" ourselves in ways we hopefully relate with our clients-- with kindness and genuine interest in the range of your inner experiences. Please contact me if you would like a companion on your meditative journey.

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