

## **Steadying Ourselves** by Nelly Kaufer, LPC

In clinical training, many of us were introduced to mindfulness as a way of stabilizing attention—returning, again and again, to the breath, the body, a chosen phrase or another focus object. There is real value in that discipline. The capacity to steady attention can regulate the nervous system, and in moments when a client is acutely distressed—or when we ourselves feel flooded—it can offer something immediate and supportive. Our work exposes us to intense emotional material, and it is not uncommon to feel pulled off center. The question is not whether we will be affected, but how we meet that impact.

And yet, if we are honest about our lived experience as clinicians, the effort to “be calm” or to hold attention steady is not always accessible. The realities of our profession compound this: the emotional weight of our clients’ lives, the ethical responsibilities we carry, and the practical uncertainties we navigate—questions of coverage, continuity of care, and even our own financial stability when caseloads fluctuate. In agency settings, these pressures may include high caseloads and interpersonal tensions among staff. These are not peripheral concerns; they are intrinsic to the field in which we practice. At times, attempts at self-regulation can become another demand—an added layer of pressure in an already complex situation. Under such conditions, trying to override our internal experience in favor of a composed state can sometimes intensify the very tension we are hoping to ease.

Reflective Meditation offers a different orientation. Rather than narrowing attention to a single point, it invites us to bring a caring, interested awareness to whatever is arising—whether that is agitation, fatigue, concern, or moments of ease. In this approach, regulation is not achieved by moving away from experience, but by allowing experience to be known. There is often a quiet settling that comes, not from controlling experience, but from accompanying it with curiosity and kindness. As we begin to notice the movement of thoughts, feelings, and reactions over time, a shift can occur. We may find that we are less entangled, less identified with any single moment of stress or reactivity.

What Reflective Meditation cultivates is not just attention, but understanding. It develops a sensitivity to the unfolding of experience—how the mind moves, how reactions arise and pass, how meaning is constructed. This has direct relevance to clinical work. As therapists, we are continually tracking multiple layers at once: the client’s narrative, our own responses, the relational field between us. If we are overly immersed in our own internal reactions, we lose perspective; if we are too detached, we lose attunement. Reflective Meditation supports a middle way—an ability to remain present while also holding a broader view.

Over time, this capacity can deepen our clinical presence. We are less likely to be overwhelmed by the intensity of what is brought into the room, not because we have shut it out, but because we have learned how to stay in relationship to it. We begin to trust our ability to metabolize experience rather than manage it. And in doing so, we offer our clients something essential: not just techniques for calming down, but a way of being with their lives that includes curiosity, steadiness, and care.