

## **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Homework Week 8**

- Practice mindfulness formally for 45 minutes every day for 6 days this week using Sitting Meditation CD and alternating every other day with the Body Scan or one of the Yoga CDs.
- Read and reflect upon: “Mindfulness and Psychotherapy” article
- Continue to cultivate your intention to increase your level of awareness during daily activities such as: eating, showering, brushing your teeth, washing dishes, taking out the garbage, reading to the kids as well as awareness of the body and opportunities to practice yoga and cultivate mindfulness during the day.
- Write out three short-term (3 months) and three long-term (3 years or more) goals that come out of your direct experience in the program and with the meditation practice. Attend the “MBSR daylong reunion retreats” when offered.
- Scan through the “Optional Readings” below and check out the list of articles, links and resources on my website at: **<http://www.bemindful.org/art.htm>**

Mindfulness. . .

- is experiencing the body, mind and spirit in the same place at the same time.
- is an awareness of the present moment and of your activity in that moment.
- is being open to more than one perspective and living with an awareness that the ways of the past may not always be the best for the present
- is learning to experience what is, instead of resisting what is.
- can help reduce stress, increase productivity, enhance relationships and be the basis of creating joy in life.
- incorporates an awareness of breathing as the vehicle used to call attention to the present moment, to renew the body and to quiet the mind.
- is knowing your purpose.
- is learning to “witness” rather than react.
- is coming back to the present moment by moment.

- Jerry Braza, PhD (author of “Moment by Moment”)

# **Riding the Dragon: The Synergistic Dance of Psychotherapy and Meditation**

by Steve Shealy, PhD

"These days... we are apt to seek out a therapist to... help us get the dragon back into its cave. Therapists of many schools will oblige in this, and we will thus be returned to what Freud called 'ordinary unhappiness.' Zen (meditation), by contrast, offers dragon-riding lessons." - David Brazier

How are Psychotherapy and Meditation related?

A wonderful fruit of my commitment to the practice and teaching of Vipassana (Insight) meditation, is the opportunity to work with psychotherapy clients who also practice meditation. From my experiences with these clients, I have come to appreciate the power and complexity of the dance between these two practices. The more I examine this dance, the less confident I am in reducing it to words. It seems to be a synergistic and dynamic process, not only one whose product is greater than the sum of its parts, but one whose product varies across time and by individual. Accepting that my investigation into psychotherapy and meditation may always be incomplete, I will address this question by sharing what I have learned so far from my research and personal clinical experience. I will begin with an examination of the limits of both and follow with how each practice can support the other.

The Limits of Psychotherapy

In my psychotherapy (hereafter therapy) practice, I often work with clients who have been in therapy on and off for a number of years, some for most of their adult lives, yet have not been able to move into "full adulthood," into a life of integrated wholeness. Despite making significant progress through the years with their psychological issues, some remnants of distorted unconscious self image, anger, grief, or self-hatred still hold them hostage to some degree. The ability to live out of their highest values and sense of purpose, or even to articulate clearly what these are, is still beyond their grasp. They complain of a gnawing sense of emptiness and a growing dissatisfaction with life.

These clients come back into therapy seeking a deeper understanding of reality and their place in it. While some of the presenting symptoms remain the same, their focus of concern has become more spiritual in nature. They sense that previous therapy helped prepare them for this spiritual journey, yet there remains a lack of direction and necessary tools to complete it. It is clearly time to go deeper. But how?

The Limits of Meditation

As a Vipassana meditation (hereafter meditation) teacher, a common complaint I hear from students who have practiced for awhile is that psychological issues are arising and disrupting the quiet peacefulness of their meditative space. One of the powerful fruits of meditation practice is the establishment of mindfulness, the skill of simply being present with what's occurring to us or within us at any moment in time without drifting into judgment, decision or internal dialogue. Meditators learn to sit patiently, watching their internal experience (the only experience we

have) rise and fall without grasping or pushing it away and staying with the essence of the experience without elaboration or emotional reactivity.

As the light of mindfulness is directed toward the workings of the mind, the layers of conditioned thought and behavior patterns, the basic ingredients and underpinnings of our psychological issues, are exposed. As the layers of the psychic onion are peeled away, deeper and more subtle aspects of the mind's inner architecture are understood. Without corresponding resolution, meditation practice will continue to be disrupted by the emotional disturbance associated with this process. It is clearly time to bring resolution to these disturbing issues. But how?

### How Meditation Can Benefit Psychotherapy

One fruit of a disciplined meditation practice is the ability to sit and observe discomfort mindfully without falling into the trap of emotional reactivity. This is a valuable resource for anyone working through painful and anxiety-producing memories and issues in therapy. Observing such feelings as panic, fear or rage without getting hooked by them allows the focus of therapy to remain on the issues, not the client's reaction to them. This clear focus allows the processing of emotionally-laden material to proceed more quickly to resolution and integration.

### How Psychotherapy Can Benefit Meditation

The meditation students who are engaged in psychotherapeutic work seem better able to progress with their meditation practice than those students who are less aggressive in resolving their psychological issues. For the students not engaged in therapy, the same disturbing issues keep coming up in the mind, blocking the meditation practice. The process of working through issues in therapy defuses the emotional charge, rendering them less disruptive. Therapy can lead to a shift in perspective to a larger, more skillful view of one's reality, both present-centered and memory-based. Resolution of underlying psychological issues allows the still focus of meditation to be safeguarded from the emotionality of the moment.

### The On-going Dance

The dance goes something like this: psychotherapy leads to the resolution of underlying psychological issues which allows meditation practice to deepen as the meditator is no longer so easily pulled off center by emotionally disruptive images, thoughts and feelings. The deepening of meditation practice allows deeper insight into how the mind reacts to such issues. With this deeper insight, further progress can be made in therapy. . . this leads to a more settled and focused meditation experience. . . which leads to deeper insight. . . and so on. . . It goes full circle with movement in one area allowing greater movement in the other.

### Riding the Dragon

What I have seen in the past few years with some of my clients who engage in both insight meditation and psychotherapy has been quite impressive. Moving through intense underlying psychological issues quickly while reporting a deepening of their meditation practice, they move along their spiritual path with less baggage and with more effective tools for the journey.