Secondary Trauma and Caregiver Fatigue for Professionals Working with Caregivers

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Secondary Traumatic Stress
A Fact Sheet for Child-Serving Professionals

“...We are stewards not just of those who allow us into their lives but of our own capacity to be helpful...”

Each year more than 10 million children in the United States endure the trauma of abuse, violence, natural disasters, and other adverse events. These experiences can give rise to significant emotional and behavioral problems that can profoundly disrupt the children’s lives and bring them in contact with child-serving systems. For therapists, child welfare workers, case managers, and other helping professionals involved in the care of traumatized children and their families, the essential act of listening to trauma stories may take an emotional toll that compromises professional functioning and diminishes quality of life. Individual and supervisory awareness of the impact of this indirect trauma exposure—referred to as secondary traumatic stress—is a basic part of protecting the health of the worker and ensuring that children consistently receive the best possible care from those who are committed to helping them.

Our main goal in preparing this fact sheet is to provide a concise overview of secondary traumatic stress and its potential impact on child-serving professionals. We also outline options for assessment, prevention, and interventions relevant to secondary stress, and describe the elements necessary for transforming child-serving organizations and agencies into systems that also support worker resiliency.

How Individuals Experience Secondary Traumatic Stress

Secondary traumatic stress is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another. Its symptoms mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Accordingly, individuals affected by secondary stress may find themselves re-experiencing personal trauma or notice an increase in arousal and avoidance reactions related to the indirect trauma exposure. They may also experience changes
in memory and perception; alterations in their sense of self-efficacy; a depletion of personal

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resources; and disruption in their perceptions of safety, trust, and independence. A partial list of symptoms and conditions associated with secondary traumatic stress includes:

- Hypervigilance
- Hopelessness
- Inability to embrace complexity
- Inability to listen, avoidance of clients
- Anger and cynicism
- Sleeplessness
- Fear
- Chronic
- Exhaustion
- Physical symptoms
- Minimizing
- Guilt

Clearly, client care can be compromised if the therapist is emotionally depleted or cognitively affected by secondary trauma. Some traumatized professionals, believing they can no longer be of service to their clients, end up leaving their jobs or the serving field altogether. Several studies have shown that the development of secondary traumatic stress often predicts that the helping professional will eventually leave the field for another type of work.4,5

**Understanding Who are at Risk**

The development of secondary traumatic stress is recognized as a common occupational hazard for professionals working with traumatized children. Studies show that from 6% to 26% of therapists working with traumatized populations, and up to 50% of child welfare workers, are at high risk of secondary traumatic stress or the related conditions of PTSD and vicarious trauma.

Any professional who works directly with traumatized children or parents, who

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**Secondary Traumatic Stress and Related Conditions: Sorting One from Another**

Secondary traumatic stress refers to the presence of PTSD symptoms caused by at least one indirect exposure to traumatic material. Several other terms capture elements of this definition but are not all interchangeable with it.

- **Compassion fatigue**, a label proposed by Figley's as a less stigmatizing way to describe secondary traumatic stress, has been used interchangeably with that term.

- **Vicarious trauma** refers to changes in the inner experience of the therapist resulting from empathic engagement with a traumatized client.13 It is a theoretical term that focuses less on trauma symptoms and more on the covert cognitive changes that occur following cumulative exposure to another person’s traumatic material. The primary symptoms of vicarious trauma are disturbances in the professional’s cognitive frame of reference in the areas of trust, safety, control, esteem, and intimacy.

- **Burnout** is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced feeling of personal accomplishment. While it is also work-related, burnout develops as a result of general occupational stress; the term is not used to describe the effects of indirect trauma exposure specifically.

- **Compassion satisfaction** refers to the positive feelings derived from competent performance as a trauma professional. It is characterized by positive relationships with colleagues, and the conviction that one’s work makes a meaningful contribution to clients and society.
Regularly hears the recounting of traumatic experiences or exhaustion related to caregiving, is at risk of secondary traumatic stress. That being said, risk appears to be greater among women and among individuals who are highly empathetic by nature or have unresolved personal trauma. Risk is also higher for professionals who carry a heavy caseload of traumatized children; are socially or organizationally isolated; or feel professionally compromised due to inadequate training. Protecting against the development of secondary traumatic stress are factors such as longer duration of professional experience, and the use of evidence-based practices in the course of providing care.

**Identifying Secondary Traumatic Stress**

Supervisors and organizational leaders in child-serving systems may utilize a variety of assessment strategies to help them identify and address secondary traumatic stress affecting staff members.

The most widely used approaches are informal self-assessment strategies, usually employed in conjunction with formal or informal education for the worker on the impact of secondary traumatic stress. These self-assessment tools, administered in the form of questionnaires, checklists, or scales, help characterize the individual’s trauma history, emotional relationship with work and the work environment, and symptoms or experiences that may be associated with traumatic stress.

Supervisors might also assess secondary stress as part of a reflective supervision model. This type of supervision fosters professional and personal development within the context of a supervisory relationship. It is attentive to the emotional content of the work at hand and to the professional’s responses as they affect interactions with clients. The reflective model promotes greater awareness of the impact of indirect trauma exposure, and it can provide a structure for screening for emerging signs of secondary traumatic stress. Moreover, because the model supports consistent attention to secondary stress, it gives supervisors and managers an ongoing opportunity to develop policy and procedures for stress-related issues as they arise.

*Formal assessment* of secondary traumatic stress and the related conditions of burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction is often conducted through use of the Professional Quality of Life Measure (ProQOL). This questionnaire has been adapted to measure symptoms and behaviors reflective of secondary stress. The ProQOL can be used at regular intervals to track changes over time, especially when strategies for prevention or intervention are being tried.
Strategies for Prevention

A multidimensional approach to prevention and intervention—involving the individual, supervisors, and organizational policy—will yield the most positive outcomes for those affected by secondary traumatic stress. The most important strategy for preventing the development of secondary traumatic stress is the triad of psychoeducation, skills training, and supervision. As workers gain knowledge and awareness of the hazards of indirect trauma exposure, they become empowered to explore and utilize prevention strategies to both reduce their risk and increase their resiliency to secondary stress. Preventive strategies may include self-report assessments, participation in self-care groups in the workplace, caseload balancing, use of flextime scheduling, and use of the self-care accountability buddy system. Proper rest, nutrition, exercise, and stress reduction activities are also important in preventing secondary traumatic stress.

Strategies for Intervention

Although evidence regarding the effectiveness of interventions in secondary traumatic stress is limited, cognitive-behavioral strategies and mindfulness-based methods are emerging as best practices. In addition, caseload management, training, reflective supervision, and peer supervision or external group processing have been shown to reduce the impact of secondary traumatic stress. Many organizations make referrals for formal intervention from outside providers such as individual therapists or Employee Assistance Programs. External group supervision services may be especially important in cases of disasters or community violence where a large number of staff have been affected.

The following books, workbooks, articles, and self-assessment tests are valuable resources for further information on self-care and the management of secondary traumatic stress:

Worker Resiliency in Trauma-informed Systems: Essential Elements

Both preventive and interventional strategies for secondary traumatic stress should be implemented as part of an organizational risk-management policy or task force that recognizes the scope and consequences of the condition. The Secondary Traumatic Stress Committee of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network has identified the following concepts as essential for creating a trauma-informed system that will adequately address secondary traumatic stress. Specifically, the trauma-informed system must

- Recognize the impact of secondary trauma on the workforce.
- Recognize that exposure to trauma is a risk of the job of serving traumatized children and families.
- Understand that trauma can shape the culture of organizations in the same way that trauma shapes the world view of individuals.
- Understand that a traumatized organization is less likely to effectively identify its clients’ past trauma or mitigate or prevent future trauma.
- Develop the capacity to translate trauma-related knowledge into meaningful action, policy, and improvements in practice.

These elements should be integrated into direct services, programs, policies, and procedures, staff development and training, and other activities directed at secondary traumatic stress.

“We have an obligation to our clients, as well as to ourselves, our colleagues and our loved ones, not to be damaged by the work we do.”

Self-Care Assessment Worksheet
http://www.ecu.edu/cs-dhs/rehb/upload/Wellness_Assessment.pdf


Compassion Fatigue Self Test
http://www.ptsdsupport.net/compassionFatigueSelfTest.html

ProQOL 5 http://proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html

References


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About the National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Established by Congress in 2000, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) is a unique collaboration of academic and community-based service centers whose mission is to raise the standard of care and increase access to services for traumatized children and their families across the United States. Combining knowledge of child development, expertise in the full range of child traumatic experiences, and attention to cultural perspectives, the NCTSN serves as a national resource for developing and disseminating evidence-based interventions, trauma-informed services, and public and professional education.
QUICK-GUIDE SUGGESTIONS PREVENTION/INTERVENTION WITH THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF CAREGIVING

B. Hudnall Stamm, Ph.D.

Individual Level

1. Self Assessment
   a. History of traumatic events
      i) If you have a history, welcome to the 50% who do 😊
      ii) What are your triggers?
      iii) Can you reduce their potency by therapy or other positive means?
   b. Stressor load outside of work environment
      i) Do you do things that refresh you?
      ii) What tasks do you have to do that use your energy?
         1) Is there a way to share the load with friends or family?
         2) What can you “not do” e.g. should you alter your expectations of what is “necessary”

2. Health behaviors
   a. Sleep—most people are sleep deprived which makes you more physically and psychologically vulnerable
   b. Exercise: even 20 minutes 3 times a week makes a difference.
      i) Consider exercising with people who help “refresh” you, multi-tasking!
   c. Diet
      i) Do you eat at regular intervals, skip meals?
      ii) Do you eat enough fresh foods?
      iii) How about your caffeine, nicotine intake?
   d. Interpersonal Relationships
      i) Do you have unfinished business with others that uses energy?
      ii) Can you tell your friends and colleagues about how your work affects you (not your client’s details) and ask for their support?
      iii) Can you tell your friends and family not to expect you to solve their problems since you are “so good at it”?

3. Other Assessment
   a. What would your friends and family tell you about your work?
   b. Can you use them to help monitor your exposure, let you know when you start to seem stressed?
   c. What do you lean from your supervision?
      i) Is your supervision “safe,” or do you monitor what you tell your supervisor? If it is not safe, can you change supervisors? Should you add an “outside of work” supervisor?

Work-Group Level

1. Caseload
   a. Can you vary your caseload?
   b. If you cannot see a variety of different patients/clients, can you:
      i) Intersperse patients/clients with administrative tasks
      ii) Distribute the level of distress of cases, mix people who are doing well and nearer completion of their therapy, or more stable cases for case management with those who are more volatile and struggling.
   c. Try to end the day (if at all possible) with a positive activity so that you don’t head home with fresh feelings of distress that you have not had time to dissipate in the work-setting where they belong. Otherwise, it is all too easy to imagine that they belong in your home/personal sphere.

2. Collegial and Professional-Peer Support
   a. Can you count on your colleagues to help
      i) Listen if you are struggling
      ii) Tell you when you are struggling more than a conversation by the coffee-pot can contain; when you need to seek supervision or professional support to deal with your feelings about work?
   b. If you cannot count on your work-colleagues
      i) Find a collegial group you can trust
         1) This may be in person, for example, a professional “lunch” group that meets for support
         2) Alternatively, it can utilize technology, e.g. telehealth, and be virtual community
      ii) Set basic ground rules for confidentiality
         1) Client confidentiality—you don’t have to tell their story; you really need to deal with how working with them made you feel! This is about you, not them.
         (2) Provider (e.g. your) confidentiality—what you share should be considered confidential unless the group agrees to share particular information. It is a necessary part of feeling safe to share.

3. Professional Hope
   a. Burnout eats your ability to envision a better life.
   b. Professionals who have hope are far better at offering it to others!

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Caring for Yourself in the Face of Difficult Work

Our work can be overwhelming. Our challenge is to maintain our resilience so that we can keep doing the work with care, energy, and compassion.

10 things to do for each day

1. Get enough sleep.
2. Get enough to eat.
3. Do some light exercise.
4. Vary the work that you do.
5. Do something pleasurable.
6. Focus on what you did well.
7. Learn from your mistakes.
8. Share a private joke.
9. Pray, meditate or relax.
10. Support a colleague.

For more information see your supervisor and visit www.psychosocial.org or www.proqol.org

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Switching On and Off

It is your empathy for others helps you do this work. It is vital to take good care of your thoughts and feelings by monitoring how you use them. Resilient workers know how to turn their feelings off when they go on duty, but on again when they go off duty. This is not denial; it is a coping strategy. It is a way they get maximum protection while working (switched off) and maximum support while resting (switched on).

How to become better at switching on and off

1. Switching is a conscious process. Talk to yourself as you switch.
2. Use images that make you feel safe and protected (switch off) or connected and cared for (switch on) to help you switch.
3. Find rituals that help you switch as you start and stop work.
4. Breathe slowly and deeply to calm yourself when starting a tough job.
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Research Summary
[2014 data compiled by Jim Carmody of UMass Medical School]

Published research has repeatedly shown that meditation and relaxation training can be powerful adjuncts to the conventional medical treatment of many disorders. The Stress Reduction Program incorporates the critical elements of all these relaxation and meditation programs and takes the healing process an important step further. A central feature of the program is the teaching of a gentle yet effective method that encourages the patient to develop a profound level of inquiry into the application of mindfulness (moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness) and mindfulness-based coping strategies in everyday life. Patients in the program are taught to become aware of, and develop, their own resources to support their health, thus becoming more stress hardy, a quality that is associated with better health across the life span.

The Stress Reduction Program has been on the cutting edge of mind/body and integrative medicine for twenty two years and represents participatory and integrative medicine at its best. Over 18,000 patients with all manner of diagnoses have successfully completed the eight-week course and 1,400 physicians have referred patients to this program. Published evaluations of the medical outcomes resulting from patient participation have shown a 35% reduction in the number of medical symptoms and a 40% reduction in psychological symptoms (stable over four years) (Kabat-Zinn 1982, 1985, 1986, 1992, 1998, Miller et al 1995, etc.).

Patients coming to the program are not separated by their referral diagnosis, so these outcome data apply across all the diagnostic categories that have been referred.

Stress and Patient Presentation

The American Academy of Family Physicians has estimated that up to two-thirds of all office visits to family doctors are for stress-related symptoms. Recent research has indicated that up to 60% of all HMO visits are made by people with no diagnosable disorder - the “worried well” (Sobel 1995) - and that many of these presenting symptoms are related to the patient’s psychosocial functioning - such things as depression, anxiety, social isolation, overwork etc. (Kroenke & Mangelsdorff 1989). At least one third of chest pain cardiology patients with normal or near normal coronary arteries have been found to be suffering from panic disorder (Kushner 1989).

Mindfulness training has been shown effective in addressing the malaise that often underlies these presentations (Kabat-Zinn 1982, 1985, 1986, 1992, Miller 1995, etc.), and further evidence of this can be seen in studies showing reduced need for clinical services following meditation training (Kabat-Zinn,1987b, Hellman 1990, Caudill 1991a, 1991b, Tate 1994, Orme-Johnson 1994).

Since its inception in 1979, more than 18,000 people have completed the eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR) and learned how to use their innate resources and abilities to respond
more effectively to stress, pain, and illness. The central focus of the SR Program is intensive training in mindfulness meditation and its integration into the challenges/adventures of everyday life.
Cognitive Diffusion Exercise

Harris (2009) provides an excellent cognitive diffusion exercise used in Acceptance & Commitment Therapy:

“Leaves on a Stream” Exercise

(1) Sit in a comfortable position and either close your eyes or rest them gently on a fixed spot in the room.

(2) Visualize yourself sitting beside a gently flowing stream with leaves floating along the surface of the water. Pause 10 seconds.

(3) For the next few minutes, take each thought that enters your mind and place it on a leaf... let it float by. Do this with each thought – pleasurable, painful, or neutral. Even if you have joyous or enthusiastic thoughts, place them on a leaf and let them float by.

(4) If your thoughts momentarily stop, continue to watch the stream. Sooner or later, your thoughts will start up again. Pause 20 seconds.

(5) Allow the stream to flow at its own pace. Don’t try to speed it up and rush your thoughts along. You’re not trying to rush the leaves along or “get rid” of your thoughts. You are allowing them to come and go at their own pace.

(6) If your mind says “This is dumb,” “I’m bored,” or “I’m not doing this right” place those thoughts on leaves, too, and let them pass. Pause 20 seconds.

(7) If a leaf gets stuck, allow it to hang around until it’s ready to float by. If the thought comes up again, watch it float by another time. Pause 20 seconds.

(8) If a difficult or painful feeling arises, simply acknowledge it. Say to yourself, “I notice myself having a feeling of boredom/impatience/frustration.” Place those thoughts on leaves and allow them float along.

(9) From time to time, your thoughts may hook you and distract you from being fully present in this exercise. This is normal. As soon as you realize that you have become sidetracked, gently bring your attention back to the visualization exercise.

What was it like at the beginning of this exercise?  
What did you notice about your thoughts?  
What was it like to place your thoughts on the leaves?  
How successful were you in clearing the stream?
Mantra Meditation

Mantra meditation is the basis of arguably the most well-known form of meditation in the West, Transcendental Meditation (TM).

Mantra comes from ancient Sanskrit and can be literally translated as 'instrument of thought.'

The most basic mantra is Om (Aum), which in Hinduism is known to be the source of all mantras.

Om is believed to be the primordial or the 'first' sound of the universe generated by the cosmic vibration that resulted in all creation (think Big Bang). The Bible also says...the beginning came from the word.

Just like our thoughts, words are a form of energy, which is quite evident in their palpable frequency and vibrations. Words carry within them the seeds of creation and are a powerful force for bringing into existence that which only exists in the ethereal plane.

What is a mantra?

A mantra is a word or phrase whose recital raises the level of consciousness by bringing about greater awareness. It opens the doorway to a deeper understanding of the self and of the laws of nature.

Buddhists use the recitation of verses as a way of cultivating an awareness of the qualities of the Buddha. Followers of the 13th century Japanese Buddhist monk, Nichiren Daishonin, chant Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō (Lotus Sutra) as the exclusive means to attain enlightenment.

It is understood that through mantra repetition, the practitioner attains unity with the chosen deity or principal idea of the mantra. The vibrations and sounds of the mantra awaken the spiritual life force and stimulate the chakras of the practitioner. The vibration of sounds also stimulates systems in the body including the nervous system, circulatory system, adrenal system, digestive system, and more.

What mantra to use?

Any verse from the holy texts like the Bible, Quran, Adi Granth, Vedas, Upanishads, Yoga Sutra and others is considered powerful enough to be repeated to great effect, and can be used for mantra meditation.

A few examples are listed below:

- **Ma-ra-na-tha**
  The word Maranatha is the final instruction of St. Paul's teachings to the Corinthians. It is also St. John's final instruction in the Book of Revelations. Thus, the last word, the final teaching of the entire Christian Bible is "Maranatha," which is Aramaic for "Come Lord"

- **Allah Hu**
  It is the traditional Sufi chant meaning "God is"
- **Om mani padme hum**
  There are various interpretations of this Buddhist mantra, but according to the XIV Dalia Lama, it means "in dependence on the practice of a path, which is an indivisible union of method and wisdom, you can transform your impure body, speech, and mind into the pure exalted body, speech, and mind of a Buddha"  

- **Sat Ta Nam Ma, mantra** translates into One God, the true name, the creator, without fear, without hatred, timeless, self-existent, made known by the Guru

The word or phrase used for doing mantra meditation need not have a deeper meaning or be significant in any way.  

Practitioners of transcendental meditation use monosyllables like *ing, im, aing, aim, shring, shrim, shiam* and *shiama* to do meditation.

Every person born in this world has a unique sound associated with them. This *beej* (seed) mantra is derived from the sound of each individual's *nakshatra-pada*.

Knowledge of the *nakshatra-pada* allows one to create a mantra unique to the individual and one that is in harmony with the universal forces.

Your can find your own personal beej mantra on the [primordial sound meditation](http://www.dowmeditation.com/mantra-meditation.html#sthash.f1MB0yAM.dpuf) page.

**How to do mantra meditation?**

Once you have decided upon the mantra to use for your meditation, begin your session with:

- observing a minute of silence with closed eyes
- start chanting the mantra gently for 10-15 minutes
- finish by sitting still for a couple of minutes with no chanting toward the end

It is recommended to do mantra meditation for 15-20 minutes twice a day.

- See more at: [http://www.dowmeditation.com/mantra-meditation.html#sthash.f1MB0yAM.dpuf](http://www.dowmeditation.com/mantra-meditation.html#sthash.f1MB0yAM.dpuf)

**TRANSFORMATIONAL MANTRAS**

Mantras are powerful tools for clearing and restructuring the subconscious mind. SAT NAM and its derivative SA TA NA MA are the two basic mantras taught by Yogi Bhajan to reorient the mind and thus open us up to the possibility of transformational change.

SAT NAM seeds the truth in our consciousness by waking us up to our divine identity. SAT NAM is the seed or bij mantra.

SA TA NA MA incorporates the nuclear sounds of SAT NAM. SA TA NA MA uses the primal sounds to connect us to the evolutionary nature of existence itself. It is referred to as the panch shabd, which means a mantra with five sound currents. The fifth sound is "A." When we chant SA TA NA MA we imprint the evolutionary code of the universe into our human psyche.

SA is the beginning, infinity, the totality of everything that ever was, is or will be.

TA is life, existence and creativity that manifests from infinity.

NA is death, change and the transformation of consciousness.
MA is rebirth, regeneration and resurrection which allows us to consciously experience the joy of the infinite.

SA TA NA MA is so primal that its impact on our psyche is like splitting an atom. The power of his mantra comes from the fact that it rearranges the subconscious mind at the most elementary level. It has the power to break habits and addictions because it accesses the level of the mind where habits are created.

A. Meditation Instructions

*From The Expanding Light Retreat*

www.expandinglight.org

Meditation is one of the most natural and profoundly rewarding of all human activities. It connects you with your own inner powers of vitality, clarity, and love.

II. First Step: Relax

One of the best ways to relax the body is to tense it first. Then, with relaxation, you will find tensions being released that you didn't even know existed. Begin your meditation experience by practicing the following two relaxation techniques. The first exercise relaxes your body, and the second calms your mind.

1. **Inhale, tense the whole body**, then throw the breath out and relax. Do this exercise three times to help rid your body of unconscious tensions.

   The breath reflects one's mental state. As the breath becomes calmer, so does the mind, and vice versa. Relax your mind before meditation, by doing this simple breathing exercise:

2. **Inhale slowly counting one to eight**, hold your breath for the same number of counts, then exhale for the same count. This is one round of "even count breathing."

   You may either lengthen or shorten the number of counts according to what is comfortable, but keep the inhalation, retention, and exhalation equal. Practice "even count breathing" six times.

III. Second Step: Watch the Breath

As the breath becomes calmer and more refined during meditation, there is a joyous feeling of peace and exaltation. Practice the following meditation technique to help calm your breath, your mind, and your whole being.

Inhale deeply, and then slowly exhale. Wait for the breath to come in of its own accord, and watch its flow. As the breath flows out naturally, again observe the movement. Don't inhale and exhale deliberately. Simply watch the breath. Don't watch your body breathing. Observe the breath itself.

Be particularly aware of the rest points between the breaths. Enjoy the peace, and the feeling of inward release and freedom that you feel when your body is without breath. Practice this technique as long as you feel to.

After a time, as you become more interiorized, concentrate at the point between the eyebrows. Concentrating here brings the awareness closer to the upper part of the nasal passage, where the breath enters the body. To center the awareness here makes it easier to watch the breath, and at the same time bring it into harmony with spiritual awareness.

Practice this for ten minutes if you can.
When you finish observing your breath, continue to sit quietly and enjoy the stillness and serenity you feel.

**USING MALA BEADS for MEDITATION**

**What is a Meditation Mala?**
A mala is a string of 108 beads with one bead as the summit bead called a 'sumeru'. It is a tool used to keep your mind on the meditation practice. Malas are generally made from different materials such as tulsi (basil) wood, sandal wood, rudraksh seeds or crystal. Each type of material has certain properties which subtly affect the subconscious mind of the practitioner.

**Why use the Mala?**
Meditation can be quite a tricky practice because the mind is like a naughty child. By its very nature, the mind tends to wander off during the meditation practice. If one's energy is low at the time of meditation, falling asleep can result. If the energy is too high, fantasy and distraction become the barriers. At such times, the mala provides the much needed anchor.

The mala beads are moved in rhythm with the breath and the mantra, so that both sleep as well as excessive mental distraction are prevented by this action upon the beads.

**How to Use?** The mala is traditionally held in the right hand and used in two ways –

In one method, the mala is hanging between the thumb and the ring (third) finger. The middle (second) finger is used to rotate the mala by one bead towards oneself with each repetition of the mantra.

In the other method, the mala is hanging on the middle finger, with the thumb used to rotate the mala just as explained - one bead at a time. Either way, the index finger is never used to touch the mala.

The mala may coil on the floor with the hand resting on the right knee or used with the hand concealed in the Mala Bag. The practice begins at the summit bead (sumeru) and continues around the loop until the summit is reached again. The summit bead is never passed over. So if you plan to do more than 1 round, the mala is turned around to proceed again in the reverse direction.
Instructions for Walking Meditation
adapted from a talk by Gil Fronsdal, December 1st, 2003

Most people in the West associate meditation with sitting quietly. But traditional Buddhist teachings identify four meditation postures: sitting, walking, standing and lying down. All four are valid means of cultivating a calm and clear mindfulness of the present moment. The most common meditation posture after sitting is walking. In meditation centers and monasteries, indoor halls and outdoor paths are often built for walking meditation. In practice outside of retreats, some people will include walking as part of their daily meditation practice—for example, ten or twenty minutes of walking prior to sitting, or walking meditation instead of sitting.

Walking meditation brings a number of benefits in addition to the cultivation of mindfulness. It can be a helpful way of building concentration, perhaps in support of sitting practice. When we are tired or sluggish, walking can be invigorating. The sensations of walking can be more compelling than the more subtle sensations of breathing while sitting. Walking can be quite helpful after a meal, upon waking from sleep, or after a long period of sitting meditation. At times of strong emotions or stress, walking meditation may be more relaxing than sitting. An added benefit is that, when done for extended times, walking meditation can build strength and stamina.

People have a variety of attitudes toward walking meditation. Some take to it easily and find it a delight. For many others, an appreciation of this form of meditation takes some time; it is an “acquired taste.” Yet others see its benefits and do walking meditation even though they don’t have much taste for it.

To do formal walking meditation, find a pathway about 30 to 40 feet long, and simply walk back and forth. When you come to the end of your path, come to a full stop, turn around, stop again, and then start again. Keep your eyes cast down without looking at anything in particular. Some people find it useful to keep the eyelids half closed.

We stress walking back and forth on a single path instead of wandering about because otherwise part of the mind would have to negotiate the path. A certain mental effort is required to, say, avoid a chair or step over a rock. When you walk back and forth, pretty soon you know the route and the problem-solving part of the mind can be put to rest.

As you walk back and forth, find a pace that gives you a sense of ease. I generally advise walking more slowly than normal, but the pace can vary. Fast walking may bring a greater sense of ease when you are agitated. Or fast walking might be appropriate when you are sleepy. When the mind is calm and alert, slow walking may feel more natural. Your speed might change during a period of walking meditation. See if you can sense the pace that keeps you most intimate with and attentive to the physical experience of walking.

After you’ve found a pace of ease, let your attention settle into the body. I sometimes find it restful to think of letting my body take me for a walk.

Once you feel connected to the body, let your attention settle into your feet and lower legs. In sitting meditation, it is common to use the alternating sensations of breathing in and out as an “anchor” keeping us in the present. In walking meditation, the focus is on the alternating stepping of the feet.
With your attention in the legs and feet, feel the sensations of each step. Feel the legs and feet tense as you lift the leg. Feel the movement of the leg as it swings through the air. Feel the contact of the foot with the ground. There is no “right” experience. Just see how the experience feels to you. Whenever you notice that the mind has wandered, bring it back to the sensations of the feet walking. Getting a sense of the rhythm of the steps may help maintain a continuity of awareness.

As an aid to staying present, you can use a quiet mental label for your steps as you walk. The label might be “stepping, stepping” or “left, right.” Labeling occupies the thinking mind with a rudimentary form of thought, so the mind is less likely to wander off. The labeling also points the mind towards what you want to observe. Noting “stepping” helps you to notice the feet. If after a while you notice that you are saying “right” for the left foot and “left” for the right foot, you know that your attention has wandered.

When walking more slowly, you might try breaking each step into phases and using the traditional labels “lifting, placing.” For very slow walking, you can use the labels “lifting, moving, placing.”

Try to dedicate your attention to the sensations of walking and let go of everything else. If powerful emotions or thoughts arise and call your attention away from the sensations of walking, it is often helpful to stop walking and attend to them. When they are no longer compelling, you can return to the walking meditation. You also might find that something beautiful or interesting catches your eye while walking. If you can’t let go of it, stop walking and do “looking” meditation. Continue walking when you have finished looking.

Some people find that their minds are more active or distractible during walking than during sitting meditation. This may be because walking is more active and the eyes are open. If so, don’t be discouraged and don’t think that walking is thus less useful. It may in fact be more useful to learn to practice with your more everyday mind.

You can train your mind to be present any time you walk. Some people choose specific activities in their daily routines to practice walking meditation, such as walking down a hallway at home or at work, or from their car to their place of work.

In our daily lives, we spend more time walking than sitting quietly with our eyes closed. Walking meditation can serve as a powerful bridge between meditation practice and daily life, helping us be more present, mindful and concentrated in ordinary activities. It can reconnect us to a simplicity of being and the wakefulness that comes from it.

A. Savoring the Small Stuff: Ordinary Gratitude as Spiritual Practice
November 18, 2012 by Carl Gregg

As I was preparing a final revision of this post on gratitude, I conveniently stumbled upon a New York Times article that echoes many of my themes. Regarding Thanksgiving, the article’s lede declares, “The most psychologically correct holiday of the year is upon us…. Cultivating an ‘attitude of gratitude’ has been linked to better health, sounder sleep, less anxiety and depression, higher long-term satisfaction with life and kinder behavior toward others, including romantic partners.”
But a precondition for reaping these benefits is making the time and space in your life to notice those things for which you are—or should be—grateful. And in this post, I’m going to be exploring some ways that we can be more intentional about noticing and responding to the parts of our lives for which we are most (and least) grateful.

**Noticing**

Douglas Burton-Christie is a theology professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He has written about the shift that happened when his daughter was three years-old and started preschool. During the first years of his daughter’s life he spent most days with her. He knew what her day was like. He was present to share her highs and lows, her joys and despairs. But when she began to spend a large portion of each day at preschool and he would ask that classic question “What did you do today?” the only response he could elicit was at most a short list of activities. (Some of you may have experienced this phenomenon with your children and teenagers.) To circumvent his daughter’s reticence to share, Burton-Christie invented a game called “Noticing.” Instead of asking, “What did you do today,” he started asking his daughter, “What did you notice today?” “Piece by piece, he learned about her world.” And because she demanded that he participate as well, he also “found himself noticing a lot more.”

What do you tend to notice in your daily life? And why? There are almost countless aspects of our moment-by-moment experience that we could notice at any given time—different sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, or emotions—but our personalities shape what stands out to us and what fades into the background. We can also get so busy that we fail to notice important details that are right in front of us. But when some detail does break through and resonate with us—either positively or negatively—that may be an invitation to reflect on why that aspect stood out in particular.

I sometimes think of the poet Mary Oliver as one of the patron saints of noticing. Many of her poems emerge from her longtime practice of rising early, walking through the woods around her house, and closely noticing the world around her. In her latest collection, *A Thousand Mornings*, one of the poems that resonated with me most strongly is titled “Poem of the One World.” She writes,

*This morning*
*the beautiful white heron*
*was floating along above the water*

*and then into the sky of*
*this one world*
*we all belong to*

*where everything*
*sooner or later*
*is part of everything else*

*which thought made me feel*
*for a while*
*quite beautiful myself.*

-Mary Oliver
If Oliver had not been paying attention that morning, she might have missed the white heron. But on that morning — one of a thousand mornings — that heron spoke to her spirit. Its graceful transition from floating in the water to soaring in the sky invoked a tangible experience within her of being connected to what Unitarian Universalists call “the interdependent web of all existence.”

So, one concrete way of cultivating gratitude is to be more intentional about noticing the world around you. And you can amplify the power of this practice — and keep yourself accountable to regularly noticing what you are grateful for — by making a commitment to share your daily gratitude (or gratitudes) with someone else, whether it is a child, a partner, or a friend. For example, I’ve seen many people this month on Facebook and Twitter, posting one gratitude per day for the month of November.

The Awareness Examen

In my own life, one of the most consistently helpful ways I have found for increasing what I notice is a practice called the Awareness Examen. The name of the practice, the Examen, sounds like examination (and the two words are etymologically related), but the ‘Examen’ to which I’m referring is spelled with an “en” at the end instead of an “in.” It derives from a Latin word that describes the pointer on a scale — what used to be called the “tongue on a balance.” Picture the display on a non-digital scale immediately after you step on it. The arrow vibrates back and forth quickly until it hones in on the exact weight. The practice of the Examen is like the arrow on that scale. It helps you weigh the value of various aspects of your life.

The examen was first detailed by Ignatius of Loyola, the 16th century founder of the Jesuits, in his book Spiritual Exercises. I wouldn’t necessarily recommend that book to you as the next book you should add to your reading list, but the examen has also been described in a much shorter and more accessible book by Dennis, Sheila and Matthew Linn called Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life. In short, the examen encourages you to respond to two questions at the end of each day either around the dinner table with your family or silently before you go to sleep: (1) “What was my moment of greatest consolation?” and (2) “What was my moment of greatest desolation?” (19).

Put more simply, you can ask “What am I most grateful for today?” and “What am I least grateful for today?” Over time, to add nuance, you can ask variations on your consolations such as, “Where did I feel most connected, most alive, most energized, or most loved?” Correspondingly, you can ask “Where did I feel most isolated, most enervated, or most taken for granted?” Many of our committees and groups here at UUCF being their meetings with a contemporary form of this practice called a “Check-in.”

I started practicing the Awareness Examen almost a decade ago, and it is one of my most consistent spiritual practices. I’ve continued to practice it almost daily because I have found it so valuable. One of the most powerful and practical gifts of this practice is that it helps you notice those people, places, and activities that consistently bring you consolation. And as you notice patterns of what consistently makes you feel connected, alive, energized, and loved, the invitation is to find ways to cultivate more of that person, place, or activity in your life.

Conversely, as you practice the Awareness Examen, you may also notice that there is a pattern of certain people, places, or activities that consistently bring you desolation. As you notice patterns of what consistently makes you feel isolated, enervated, or taken for granted, an
invitation is to consider if you should find ways to have less of that person, place, or activity in your life.

The Spiritual Practice of Savoring

This practice of noticing and choosing what is life-affirming over what is life-negating can seem particularly simple or obvious: structure your life to do more frequently those things that bring you consolation and do less frequently those things that bring you desolation. However, we can often get so busy that we don’t take time to notice even these simple patterns.

Even if I’m dead tired when I lay down to go to sleep, my practice — instead of counting sheep — is to gently think back through my day, and name those things I’m grateful for. It’s honestly a great way to fall asleep: savoring those things you are most grateful for. In wake of the election, I spoke last week about the importance of savoring: when love wins, when peace prevails, and when the marginalized are included, we need to pause and savor that moment. In recent year, savoring has become one of my most central spiritual practices. To be clear about what I mean by savoring, it is giving yourself permission to linger over your moments of consolation and re-experience them with your whole self to help fully integrate those consolations into yourself.

The Awareness Examen is an old spiritual practice, dating back, as I said, at least to the 1500s. But contemporary the benefits of savoring your consolations. Some of you may be familiar with the 2009 book *Buddha’s Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom* by Rick Hanson, a Ph.D. neuropsychologist, and Richard Mendius, a M.D. neurologist. One of the insights that has stayed with me from that book is the metaphor that, “Your brain is like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positive ones” (41).

These two scientists, along with many other researchers, are mounting an argument that those of our ancestors whose brains noticed negative — potentially threatening — experiences faster and remembered those potentially threatening experiences longer, were more likely to avoid predators, survive, and pass their genes on to the next generation. And when our ancestors were living in the wild with potential predators all around, having a brain that latched onto negative experiences like velcro — in an almost obsessive way — was an important survival tool. But in our contemporary world, this evolutionary inheritance can sometimes give us a neurotic focus on the negative over the positive. And we can wish our brain were more inclined to hold on to all those positive aspects of our life that we are grateful for. But our sources of gratitude often slip away from our attention, like teflon, especially when we are under stress — which mimics that experience of being under threat from a predator — and we find ourselves fixating first and foremost on the negative.

Through my spiritual direction training, I had heard about savoring before reading *Buddha’s Brain*, but I was nonetheless pleased to see Hanson and Mendius explicitly promoting the practice of savoring. To counterbalance our brain’s tendency to be “like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positives ones,” they write, regarding our consolations: Savor the experience. It’s delicious! Make it last by staying with it for 5, 10, even 20 seconds; don’t let your attention skitter off to something else. The longer that something is held in awareness and the more emotionally stimulating it is, the more neurons that fire and thus wire together, and the stronger the trace in memory.
Focus on your emotions and body sensations…. Let the experience fill your body and be as intense as possible. For example, if someone is good to you, let the feeling of being cared about bring warmth to your whole chest.

Pay particular attention to the rewarding aspect of the experience — for example, how good it feels to get a great big hug from someone you love. Focusing on these rewards increases dopamine release, which makes it easier to keep giving the experience your attention, and strengthens its neural associations in implicit memory. (69-70)

So if you feel like your life is particularly un-Buddha-like at any given moment, then a practice of savoring the small stuff — the simple, ordinary parts of your life that you are grateful for — is a way of cultivating a more Buddha-like brain.

**Ordinary Gratitude**

Personally, when I’m walking my dogs around the neighborhood, I often take a deep breath, and savor the view of the surrounding vistas. Mountains speak to my spirit in the same way that heron spoke to Mary Oliver. And the many break-taking views all over Frederick, Maryland are one of the many reasons I am grateful to live here. I try to savor these views many times each day.

Every time I walk out the front doors of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Frederick and across the parking lot to my car, I similarly try to take a deep breath and savor the many reasons that I am grateful for my job — and the opportunity to spend my life joining with my congregation in promoting and living out the Principles of Unitarian Universalism and diving deeply in all Six Sources of UUism (see: [http://www.uua.org/beliefs/principles](http://www.uua.org/beliefs/principles)).

And each morning when I get up, I usually find that Magin has already made breakfast for me. I try to pause and savor Magin’s gift of embodying her love through concrete acts like cooking.

Speaking more broadly, despite the diversity within Unitarian Universalism, many of us can agree about the importance of savoring that first cup of coffee or tea in the morning. Along these lines of slowing down and savoring each bite of our meals, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk has written an entire book titled *Savor: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life*. Among many practices, he recommends, **setting down your utensil between bites to give yourself an opportunity to truly savor each mouthful.**

Here in the developed world, where it can be easy to take simple conveniences for granted, we can sometimes forget to savor even the simple pleasure of taking a hot shower. Savoring can be a way of transforming a shower from a chore you have to do to before your first appointment of the day into an experience of how pleasant, relaxing, and relaxing a cascade of warm water can be. And in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, those of us who lost power received a reminder to be grateful and **savor the remarkable fact that most days we can flip a switch and produce light and heat.**

To note one further invitation for gratitude and savoring, the Sufi mystic Rumi has a challenging line in his poem “Breadmaking” that says, **“The way you make love is the way God will be with you.”** To keep this post G-rated, suffice it to say, that is an invitation to slow down, and truly savor those people, places, and activities that bring us the greatest consolation.
Gratitude as a Practice

Of course, all this talk about gratitude and savoring is easier said than done. Cultivating ordinary gratitude, noticing our consolations and desolations, and savoring them are all practices that happen over time. As with practicing the piano, practicing basketball, or practicing yoga, method and frequency matter. As you’ve heard me say before, quoting one of my swim instructors, “Practices doesn’t necessarily make perfect, but it does make permanent.” If you are sloppy with your swimming strokes, you may find that your lazy stoke has become your unconscious way of swimming – even in competition. The same rules apply with practicing a piano piece, honing your free throw shot, or trying to do a yoga pose correctly. Practice makes permanent by ingraining habits that are difficult to break. And so it is with gratitude. Even though our brains are “like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positives ones,” the more we notice our consolations and give ourselves permission to savor what we are grateful for, the more we can inculcate a groove of gratitude even in our gratitude-resistant, Teflon-like brains.

If gratitude is a practice that we are invited to practice everyday, then the holiday season is like the World Series of practicing gratitude. And on Thanksgiving Day, when many of us will be spending time with family, we are presented with a particularly fruitful time to remember that our brains are “like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positives ones.” Our family members are often simultaneously some of the people we are most grateful for and the ones who can trigger our worst selves most easily. As was said at a recent Pastoral Care training I attended, “Your family members are the ones who can most easily press your buttons because they are the ones that sewed on your buttons!”

The Buddha’s Brain researchers have noted that, “in relationships, it typically takes about five positive interactions to overcome the effects of a single negative one” (41). So if being around your family is particularly challenging, an invitation is to try to carve out some time each day you will be around extended family to savor what you are grateful for as a way of compensating for those accompanying desolations. That may involve journaling or a really long walk to get some perspective if familial strife hits a peak.

Notes


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My Self Care Plan

What came up for me today about workplace stress, caregiver fatigue, or secondary trauma was. . . .

Symptoms of distress or areas I may want to give attention to in myself are. . .

Patterns that I should be aware of as a professional working with caregivers who may experience caregiver fatigue are. . . .

What I currently do to manage workplace stress/secondary trauma is. . . .

The strategies we reviewed today that I would like to practice or add to my toolbox to share with caregivers are. . .