

Resolution Reflections: Mediation and Meditation

by Jay Uhler

People often look at mediation or meditation in print and the opposite one registers in their mind. The thought could be that they look a lot alike. Let me suggest that they are more similar than a first glance would indicate.

Resolving conflicts can be difficult. Meditation in my experience is far more difficult. Why then would a mediator consider it? I believe that meditation can assist a mediator to mediate better. I also believe that mediation can be a form of meditation.

The Focused Mediator Meditation is a conscious process of learning to focus the mind inward. Meditation can be done with the eyes closed or open. Each approach can be beneficial to a mediator and both are relevant to mediation.

The eyes closed approach may be more comfortable to explore memories and emotions, because it can seem safer. The eyes open approach can be better to develop the experience of meditation with mediation. I am pleased to recommend two books¹ about meditating with your eyes open as a way of being connected with the outer world while exploring the inner world.

In mediation, the capacity to focus is important. The mediator needs to focus on the needs of the parties, even when the disputants do not know their needs. The mediator also must be in tune with the feelings that the disputants bring to the table. If the core needs and the core feelings do not get addressed, resolution to the conflict is often blocked. Resolution to me is when all of the parties to the dispute have their needs met to the greatest possible satisfaction of everyone.

The discipline and experience of meditation assists our capacity to focus. In meditation a person may place the focus on their breath, a word, or sound as a way to clear their mind. The mind constantly wants to take over with thoughts about anything and everything. It wants to avoid the focus on events or emotions that clear the mind. The mind resists the possibility of pain. It continuously creates distracting thoughts to take the mind away from focusing on anything that will be more upsetting than life is already.

Disputants in mediation constantly shift away from the issues, especially if they become afraid that their needs will not be met or that they will lose something or have to give up something. They may do it unconsciously or consciously, but it takes a well-focused mediator to avoid being led astray by subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, diversion from the issues at hand.

During mediation, some people bring emotions to the conflict that they are unable to express because they have never been taught the skills to express their feelings in constructive ways. Other people have repressed their feelings because they learned that to express emotions has negative repercussions that are painful. Often a role of the mediator is to create safety for the persons to release their feelings and at times the mediator must help the disputants to recognize the core emotion that is present.

The Peaceful Mediator In order to do this, mediators must be aware of and comfortable with their own feelings. When we mediators practice meditation, it opens our

hearts and minds to unexplored memories and emotions. When we are able in our personal meditation to avoid judging our thoughts and feelings, we can get in touch with our humanity in new ways. As we experience our own humanity, we allow others to be more human and enable them to be in better touch with their humanity.

When meditation is based on a connection with Universal Love, we accept our emotions and ourselves. That brings peace within us and opens our hearts to others. It leads to peace with others and becomes a model for peace between others.

As models of peace, we bring a calm to the mediation process that is contagious. We bring an acceptance of the ideas and emotions of the disputants that is calming. We bring a solid presence when we set limits on disputant's actions that would interfere with safety in the room. We provide the opportunity for the disputants to express themselves and to connect through positive interactions that lead to resolution.

Meditative Mediation Both as a therapist and as a dispute resolution professional, I am aware of a level of content underneath the words that people speak. By tuning into disputants at a deeper level we are better able to hear their true meanings. They are often surprised that we understand their intent better than they are able to express it themselves. They are also pleased that when the other party does not hear them accurately, we are able to present their thoughts and feelings in a different or more direct so way that they are understood. This adds clarity to the process.

Meditation not only helps clear the mind of clutter and chatter, it opens us up to ourselves and to others, and it also opens us to the energy of the universe. I believe there are often insights that come to me during therapy or conflict resolution that are not my own. The source of those insights is what I refer to as Love Energy, which is universal. Others have their own labels for that Source.

When meditation is practiced with our eyes open it assists us to be aware of three dimensions, which spiritually are all one. It connects us with the Source of universal insight. It connects us with our deeper selves. It connects us with the outside world of others. This can be called meditative mediation. This model of meditative mediation is offered for your reflection.

My concluding reflections are these. Supervision, training, and skill are essential. Meditation can take mediation to another level—one of enlightened consciousness.

¹Two books that have been helpful in my understanding of meditation are Chödrön, Pema. 1997. *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc. and Perrin, Stuart. 2001. *A Deeper Surrender: Notes on a Spiritual Life*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc.

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