

EMDR & Buddhist Practice: A New Model of PTSD Treatment



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EMDR Therapy – Introduction

- Comprehensive trauma therapy system
- Highly effective, gold-standard
- Multi-modal
- Integrative, meta-therapy
- Client-centered
- Optimistic

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EMDR – Implicitly Contemplative

- Secular – **not explicitly** contemplative
- Meditative qualities
 - Silent, interior exploration
 - Rhythmic bilateral stimulation
- No formal meditation
 - Only normal levels of attention
 - No transcendental concepts
- But **implicitly** contemplative
 - By functional analogy with Buddhist practice
 - Works by insight

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EMDR & Buddhism – Overview

- EMDR
 - Phase 1 – safety, confidence & stability
 - Phase 2 – trauma processing
- Buddhist Practice
 - Refuge & attentional stability
 - Insight meditation

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Phase 2 – Trauma Processing Overview

- Invoke Phase 1 skills
- Invoke traumatic material
- Identify positive belief
 - Put in background
- Rate distress level
- Actual trauma processing

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Phase 2 – Actual Trauma Processing

- Brief sets of silent free association
 - Catalyzed by bilateral stimulation (BLS)
- Between sets, therapist:
 - Asks “what do you get now?”
 - Assesses progress or blockage
 - Mostly says “go with that” for another set
 - Or if needed, offers targeted intervention
 - Occasionally asks for updated distress rating
- Repeat until distress level is 0 or 1

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EMDR's Free Association

- Primed with multimodal image:
 - Emotions
 - Negative Belief / Positive Belief
 - Body sensations
- Attention, both:
 - Moves among linked content
 - Fixes on particular content
- Activates natural recovery process
 - Integrates trauma memory into web of experience
 - Enables insight into trauma memory's true nature
 - Dissolves traumatic distress

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Case Example – Processing Traumatic Material

Deborah: Put all those pieces together – the image of you holding her, the negative belief “it’s my fault”, the desperation and agony, those sensations in your eyes, heart, hands and arms.

Tina processes silently with a BLS set
Tina: It’s weird, amazing! My body, it feels gently rocked. Restful. Peaceful. She was gasping for air. I held her close.

Tina processes again
Oh my, I just remembered something I forgot all these years. I touched my hand to her cheek. I kissed her forehead, told her I loved her.

Tina processes more
Even though the picture is in my head, it’s not disturbing. No chills. I’m outside it for the first time in my life. Not in it. Stepped back. Like a movie. Could see me holding her.

Deborah: How disturbing is it to you right now?
Tina: The distress is almost gone. I’m watching it. It was a terrible incident. I picture it. It wasn’t my fault. Good.

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Mahayana Analytical Insight Meditation

- Moving as well as fixed attention
- Start with topic or theme
- Explore from multiple standpoints
- When glimmer of insight arises...
- Concentrate on particular thoughts
 - Vivid, felt, experiential – not just cognitive
- Result is leap of insight – “aha” moment

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Object of negation
Opposing & integrative content
Analytical insight meditation
EMDR free association

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Analytical insight meditation
EMDR free association

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Remaining Processing

Done

- Processed **traumatic material**
 - Distress is gone
 - Re-experiencing ended

Yet to do

- Revisit & process **positive belief**
 - Until it’s strong
- Process lingering **body discomfort**
 - Until neutral or positive

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Case Example – Processing the Positive Belief

DEBORAH: As you think about the image you started with, the moment your friend died, is “I’m worthy” still the thought you would prefer about yourself?

TINA: I want to change it to “I’m a loving person.”

DEBORAH: Good. On the scale from 1 to 7, how true is that thought?

TINA: Oh, I think a 5.

DEBORAH: What gets in the way of a 6 or 7?

TINA: I don’t know if she heard me, felt my kiss; maybe I was too late.

DEBORAH: Go with that.

Tina processes silently with BLS

TINA: (With tears running down her face) Oh, I see, it doesn’t work that way; it’s about the love. I gave her what she needed the most. I told her I loved her. I *am* a loving person.

DEBORAH: (Gently) Yes. So, on the scale of 1 to 7, how true is that thought now?

TINA: A 7. I couldn’t save her, but I did love her, do love her.

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