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Social Work Self-Care: The Art of Outside Meditation



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Man Meditating

by Ian DeGeer

It is early. Most people are not awake at 5 a.m. But this is the chosen time and this is when I awaken to take care of myself. For a very long time, I have had a meditation practice. Mostly watching my breath, bringing awareness to the moment, just being present. This summer, I have taken a new approach to my morning meditation ritual. I am doing it outside.

This might not seem extreme or particularly novel, but outside meditation requires a different approach. It takes the practice of meditation, the art of sitting in silence, and transforms it into the art of an engaged practice. Inside my home, meditation is silent, quiet as the rest of my family sleeps. Outside at 5 a.m., the world is waking up. The birds have begun in earnest to sing and communicate throughout my neighborhood. I hear the hum of the traffic on the highway in the distance, and the breeze pulls me into each moment. I am aware of the morning heat and humidity that has failed to dissipate overnight. I am engaged beyond simply watching my breath but to the world that surrounds me in this moment.

This engaged meditation practice benefits not only me, but those with whom I work. Through working on being attentive in those meditation sessions, I am learning how to be present during the rest of the day. When I am in sessions with individuals, I am truly "in-session" and my mind is focused on the present moment. Their needs supplant my own, and they receive completeness from me.

It strikes me that the self-care that I engage in every day is really not necessarily all about me. Certainly, I benefit from my meditation practice in numerous ways. I am able to manage stress better. I am more in tune with my thoughts and emotional well-being, and I feel grounded throughout the

day. However, all of these benefits extend to my interactions with my colleagues, individuals, and families that I work with on a daily basis. My self-care is self-care for them as well, and through meditation, I believe that I am continually learning about the inter-connectedness that lies between us all. In this way, our self-care extends beyond the self and is done for others.

Perhaps that is the greatest lesson of all.

Ian DeGeer is a Ph.D. candidate at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. He has held a meditation practice for 20 years.

Editor's Note: This article is part of The New Social Worker's Self-Care Summer 2016 Project. For more ideas on self-care, see [The A-to-Z Self-Care Handbook for Social Workers and Other Helping Professionals](#).

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Strategies and tools to reach *your* self-care goals, your own way, on your own terms.



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