Walking in Sacred Space

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SYNOPSIS

This paper explores the nature of the relationship between the person and the natural environment through the lens of a Buddhist model of conditioned mental process. Using the concept of mindfulness as a way to understand our perceptions in the outdoors (and elsewhere), it explores how a deep encounter with the other-ness of this natural world can enrich experience of both the mundane and the spiritual. When we take this understanding into therapeutic contexts, the understanding of mindfulness as an appreciation of spiritual depth leads us, among other things, to an appreciation of something which can be described by the term 'sacred space'. The paper goes on to explore different types of sacred space common to different cultures, suggesting three categories: the sacred circle or containing space; the shrine or focal space; and the pilgrimage or mobile space. It concludes by exploring the labyrinth as an ancient spiritual model which incorporates all three types of sacred space into a form which can inspire therapeutic process in the outdoors and elsewhere.

Mental states are conditioned by the things to which we give attention. When we look at a sunset, read a newspaper article, or think about the dentist appointment tomorrow, our emotional and psychological state changes. The experience impacts upon us emotionally and cognitively, both shaping our interpretations and reactions to the thing which we hold in attention, and, more globally, affecting our moods and preoccupations. The focus of our attention not only creates what we see, but also informs the story we give to the circumstances which surround it and the world in general. Working with attention is therefore fundamental to psychological change.

Attention has two components. It has a focus, the object on which we concentrate. It also has a quality, which includes both its intensity and its emotional associations. These two components, focus and quality, can both be influenced through therapeutic means, but are also subject to the influence of powerful conditioned forces within the mentality. Attention and mentality form a self-replicating cycle which can be interrupted through awareness and deliberate shaping of attention.

Working out of doors provides a therapeutic field through which positive changes in attention which bring about healthier mental states can be developed. In particular, in shaping the quality of attention, the cultivation of a deep respect for all forms of life and non-life brings psychological and spiritual benefits. This article draws on the Buddhist understanding of mindfulness to explore the way that it facilitates a basic change in the quality of relationship to things. It will look at how these changes of perception condition a perspective which respects the natural world as 'other' and as a source of spiritual insight which can be described as sacred. Finally, it will reflect on three forms of spiritual space, common to a number of spiritual traditions, and show how the idea of sacred space can bring depth into ecotherapy work.

Attention

Our habits of attention are created over time. They are expressed through our senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, the body sense and the perceiving mind.[1] These patterns of behaviour, which include both tendencies to focus on particular objects and the quality of attention, are conditioned by our histories, identifications and current context. They include the assumptions and interpretations which we make about what we experience, and are grounded in our basic life philosophies and values. For the most part, they are unconsciously structured around our needs for security and familiarity. They can, however, be deliberately developed by engaging in the conscious, intentional process of training the mind, using such practices as meditation or cognitive exercises. They can also be fostered through intentionally placing oneself in the orbit of conscious and unconscious influences which are growth promoting. Both these approaches have precedents in Buddhist practice, but translate well to the therapy context.

Habits of attention and the mentality which underpins them are mutually conditioning. Our general mind states influence how we direct our attention (when we are in a negative mood, we tend to notice all the things which are going wrong around us). At the same time, deliberately focusing attention on things which are positive and uplifting tends to condition a positive outlook. Such an approach obviously risks Pollyanna-ish avoidance, but healthy attention, as we will see, involves experiences which might be thought by some to be disturbing rather than denying it.

Environmentally based therapies offer one significant route to rebuilding healthy patterns of attention. Working out of doors, attention is drawn by many different things which attract the senses and evoke a variety of responses. This in itself is health promoting, and tends to invite more positive, open mind-states.

For some people, being in natural surroundings is an unusual experience. It interrupts habitual mental patterns simply because the new situation cuts through mental dullness and stimulates attention. The person starts to notice things which might previously have been overlooked. I remember, for example, taking a group of women from a council estate in the North East on a camping weekend. On our way home we passed an old boat at the entry to the estate where they lived which had been planted with flowers. 'Eee, isn't that lovely!', the women commented. They must have walked past that boat many times previously and never noticed it, but coming back after two days in the forest, they saw it with fresh eyes.

Even for those more accustomed to being out of doors, the situation of going into nature is rich in sensory stimuli, many of which are pleasant, and some of which are challenging. Experiences touch people at many levels, drawing their attention away from self-preoccupation and worries and holding it on external phenomena.

At the same time, since perception is conditioned by prior experience, even in the natural world, people import values and behaviours from other areas of life, and these may mediate or diminish their connection to the wild. When I took the group of women to whom I referred above camping, they were initially very unsure about the whole experience. The first evening, not helped by a cloud of midges which descended upon us, they huddled together on a bench by the roadside, drinking cans of beer which they had brought with them, turning their backs on the landscape and demanding to be taken home. At this point the whole experience seemed too alien and threatening for them, and their only interest was in finding familiar outlets for their anxiety. It was only later, as they started to gain confidence and have some more enjoyable experiences exploring the forest, that they began to take an interest in the surroundings. Discovering new ways of seeing takes time.

The quality of attention, and the assumptions and values implicit in it, are important. Some sorts of attention may not be health promoting, even in the most unspoilt surroundings. For example a person who goes out in order to kill wildlife for sport may have violent or competitive intentions. A person who takes part in off-road motor rallying may be more interested in driving in challenging conditions and the performance of the vehicle than in noticing the surroundings. A group of youths may be more intent on getting drunk or finding places away from parental view for illicit sex than on enjoying nature. Despite this, in such situations, some aspects of the experience of being out of doors will probably have positive impact at both conscious and unconscious levels.

Experience is multi-levelled. Even when conscious attention is highly directed, unconscious or semi-conscious influences continue alongside the main focus of attention. These influences may evoke psychological material which is deeply personal or, commonly, more

broadly based in collective frameworks. Working out of doors we are affected by the cultural assumptions of our community. These are so deeply ingrained that we take them for granted. Common associations are hidden by their universality within a particular social or national group, but these buried resources nevertheless add depth to the experience of the wild. Living in relationship with nature is the common heritage of most humans, and so connects us to universal meaning. Such work takes us into the realms of myth and archetype as well as personal history.

Mindfulness, Mystery and the Sacred

The practice of mindfulness has had considerable influence on fields of mental health and on psychological therapies in recent years. Whilst many interpretations of the practice follow Jon Kabat Zinn's[2] emphasis on purposeful present awareness within a non-judgemental frame, a return to the textual origins of mindfulness in the Satipatthana Sutta[3] reveal that the original teaching offers other resources to the psychotherapist.[4]

The Satipatthana Sutta describes the practice of developing mindfulness in four stages. Starting by focusing attention on the body experience, the method involves firstly observing the physical experience of the body in moving, sitting and breathing. It explores how this experience can then be perceived as giving rise to reactivity and the creation of mental formations. Finally, mindfulness practice leads to a realization of the nature of all phenomena. In this four-stage structure, mindfulness is presented as a lens through which spiritual insight is acquired by a practice of detailed attention.

In particular, the teaching invites cognitive appreciation of the provisional quality of existence. All things, both internal and external, are found to exist only as a result of particular conditions being in place. They are also found to be of a nature to decay and dissipate. As attention is given to the breath, the body, the thought or any perceived object, the practitioner develops awareness of both that it exists in the present moment and that it is fragile in its existence. In mindfulness practice the inevitability of birth and death exists simultaneously alongside the present moment.

Mindfulness is concerned with recognizing the insubstantial nature of all things. It is about observing the processes of origination and impermanence as they occur in material and mental phenomena. In the natural world, observation of transience and vulnerability is far more immediate than in the human-made environment. Birth and death, creation and decay are ever present in the wood, the river and the field. In the sixth century BCE, when the Buddha developed his teachings, the world was less urbanized, and spiritual seekers spent much of their time in the forests and countryside. The practice of mindfulness developed in a context where evidence of life and death was all around.

In the Satipatthana Sutta we find meditations on the decay of the body and on the constituent substances to which it can be reduced. This focused investigation is the foundation of psychological and spiritual transformation in Buddhism. When we go into the woods and moorlands it is not uncommon to encounter the corpses of animals or fallen trees. Mindfulness practice leads naturally to an investigation of impermanence. Contact with the natural world similarly raises important life questions, both consciously, and implicitly in the depth process of the work. In it we encounter our existential nature and the nature of others, and reach a heart understanding of origination and impermanence, creation and destruction, interconnection and dependence.

Mindfulness creates a window to the mystery of life and the inexplicable. It can be seen as a practice of respectful reconnection to existence. It reveals the non-controllability of the other and our own vulnerability. These experiences touch us. They open our minds and hearts to spiritual truths. In other words, through mindful awareness we make contact with the sacred.

Otherness as Container

Buddhist psychology[5] offers a model for understanding the processes which condition and maintain an illusory sense of control in our lives. The feeling of solid identity and permanence is created as the attention is drawn to particular perceptual objects which have personal psychological significance. Things are experienced as attractive or non-attractive because they support or conflict with the sense of self. This sort of self-building attention is described in a theory of attachment (not to be confused with the Western theory of the same name), and operates through processes of craving and clinging. According to this theory, all problematic mental states are manifestations of greed, hatred or delusion, the three modes of clinging.

An unrealistic sense of individual rights and entitlement is the organizing feature of the ordinary psyche, and the resulting sense of self is seen in

Buddhism as defensive. It is the mechanism for avoiding knowledge of the reality of impermanence and vulnerability. This model can be applied not only to individuals, but also to groups. It offers explanation as to why human behaviour often has negative impacts environmentally. Nationalism, consumerism, exploitation of overseas resources, and international conflicts are all linked to the assertion of collective identity, and distancing from those identified as other. They are based on fear and avoidance of the true facts of human vulnerability, and they lead to alienation from others and from the basic life-processes.

Given the practical analysis which this approach offers, it is not surprising that Buddhist ideas have come to influence Western psychotherapy practice. One framework by which this process is translated into therapeutic language is the other-centred model. Other-Centred Therapy[6] is based on reversing the disconnection which is so common in human experience, and working to help the client build clean connection and empathy with others, whether human or environmental. Through this process of reconnection, they are helped to free themselves from the distortion and rigidity of perception which constitutes the basis of so many psychological problems.

One of the ways in which this happens is through mindfulness. By bringing into question the mental attachments which commonly infiltrate experience, mindfulness leads to a cleaner encounter with others, human and non-human. It is the practice of directing attention towards direct experience of what is true and substantive, and recognizing the defensive constructions of the mind in the process. As the clinging mind attempts to construct a reliable, constant identity, it replicates the familiar in its perception of the surrounding world. As clinging diminishes, experience becomes an ever-changing kaleidoscope which is not pinned down, but flows freely.

Working out of doors, many people naturally feel more connected. Despite the fact that we are always at some level distancing ourselves from our surroundings, it is much more common to be startled out of self-preoccupation when immersed in wild surroundings. Nature can feel comforting and such experiences positive. Living creatures, weather, geological features and vegetation draw us out of thoughts and concerns, or simply startle us by their beauty or curiosity. We are touched by such experiences. This feeling of connection is, for many of us, what draws us back into these places.

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This sense of connection is not, however, universal, and for some people the non-urban environment is threatening and alien. Taking people from inner-cities out into the countryside can be a very positive experience, but there is often a hurdle of resistance to be overcome before the experience becomes enjoyable. Humans resist the unfamiliar, and the edge of anxiety between the new and the habitual is an area which other-centred work commonly explores. Moving beyond the comfort zone with support can be particularly helpful.

Buddhist psychology suggests that the self is defensive. Attachment processes create a perception of the world which mirrors and reinforces the identity by directing attention in selective ways. This process limits the experience of reality. The sense of self is a necessary because it makes life manageable and mediates anxiety, but it is restrictive. Psychological growth involves transcending the more rigid aspects of identification and recognizing the reality of the other.

Trapped in the cycle of conditioned perception, the mind follows familiar tracks, building up patterns of interpretation. These are often problematic, but they arise out of a compulsive desire for self-preservation. The central delusion is the search for permanence. In Buddhist thought there is a tension between the desire for existence and the desire for connection. At one extreme, the illusion of a fixed and permanent self creates a psychological bubble which insulates the person from their surroundings and from knowledge of changeability. At the other extreme, full awareness of the nature of all phenomena, including oneself, as dependent and impermanent, without the spiritual foundation of faith, is frightening and disabling. Psychological well-being in the ordinary sense is about

achieving a balance in which the person is less at the mercy of mental processes, and more open to the other-than-self world.

As mindfulness practice strengthens other-focused attention, self-preoccupation diminishes and people trust their experience more. With growing entrustment, the world, and not the self, becomes the container for psychological process. The person trusts the life process and lives, confident in the other-than-self. He moves beyond fear into relatedness. In as much as this state is achieved, the person feels secure and contained.

Holy Ground

Mindfulness practice often begins with physical activities such as walking and sitting with awareness. These practices are good ways to start working out of doors. When a person practises mindful walking, each foot connects with the earth in a spirit of entrustment. Awareness is brought to the activity. Detailed observation of movement within the bones and sinews of the foot reveals a mysterious process, which unfolds largely beyond the conscious control of the person who walks. Even as we try to walk consciously, moving each muscle intentionally and noticing the exact manner and intensity with which the foot makes contact with the soil, we discover that walking mostly happens to us. It is a synthesis of will and willingness. If we become too self-conscious we wobble, and may even lose our balance and start to fall. We learn to trust that the body knows how to take a step and how to stand. Mindfulness of the body involves discovering the body's otherness.

On our eco-therapy programmes, we generally begin our work with a grounding exercise. Placing our feet consciously, solidly upon the soil, we connect to the earth. We bring attention to the body, and to the interface with the ground where we are standing, and we explore the embodied experience of entrusting ourselves to the earth. We experience its reliability.

The earth is the constant in our lives. It is our starting point and our end point. It is the container within which everything that we do and experience unfolds. In so far as there is continuity in our experience, it is represented by the connection to the earth. Even if we are at sea or in the air whilst travelling in a ship or plane, we still experience the power of gravity, reminding us of our planetary existence. We still know that we are held.

Connection and support resonate in the experience of grounding. At a simple material level, we feel in contact with the physical presence of our world. At a deeper level we feel connected to the fundamental experience of being alive on this planet, which is shared by the human and other-than-human realms. At a spiritual level we may sense a relationship to the transcendent, feeling the supporting ground as a metaphor for more universal or spiritual sources of support. Other symbolic connections emerge. Some are collective, others personal. We feel the Earth as mother or lover, goddess or warrior,[7] as the felt-sense speaks to our histories and personal mythologies.

Mindfulness practice invites the experience of reverence. It is the practice of recalling and sensing the levels of meaning which lie beyond the day-to-day. Grounding exercises involve opening not only to what is anticipated, but also to what lies beyond it. Specifically it is about experiencing the sacred within the mundane, and touching the great mystery within our ordinary act of standing on the ground. If we remain locked into the familiar, we tie ourselves into limited mental boxes. Mindfulness involves developing awareness which is attentive and open ended, which sees the depth-meaning in things. Experience of the actuality of things becomes a lens to the unknown and unpredictable.

Environmentally based therapies work at the interface between conventional psychotherapies, rooted in indoor spaces and sharply defined by formalities, and free encounter with the undefined spaces and lore of the outdoors. They draw not only on Western theoretical models, but also on other more intuitive forms of human exploration. For this reason, working out of doors, one may draw on models from various healing and spiritual traditions to understand our ways of working. In fact, the spiritual traditions of many cultures share common patterns of thought, and we can draw on these in our work.

So far in this article we have explored the Buddhist idea of mindfulness and its role in opening the psyche to a more profound appreciation of the life-realities. We have seen that through opening attention to the other as represented by natural phenomena, environment and even the body, awareness of basic truth, which might be thought of as the sacred, is found to permeate everything.

In the Ten Directions training programme in ecotherapy[8] run by Tariki Trust, the second element of the model is called Sacred Space. Sacred space is experienced when we give mindful attention to the environment in which we are working, recognizing its holding quality, its unique, fragile existence and its mystery as an unknowable otherness.

Encountering the sacredness of all things is not

subject to a particular religious frame. It is a universal experience, which can be related to many spiritual traditions as well as more secular frameworks. In the following three sections of this article I will identify three types of space which are commonly found in different cultures and spiritual systems, and explore how they can offer motifs which can be useful to the therapist in understanding how spaces may be experienced by groups and individuals, and how working places can be created that honour these qualities. These spaces are: the sacred circle, the shrine and the pilgrimage route.

The Sacred Circle

The sacred circle, in one form or other, is common to many cultures. People create spaces where they can meet. Such places have special qualities. The circle symbolizes coming together, equality and unity. In creating a sacred circle we enclose a space and designate it as powerful. We recognize a particular area of ground and mark out a boundary, defining it as a place apart or a central hub for ordinary life. Boundaries create intensity and clarify identity, and the boundary of the sacred space holds the group's power within the location where it can be entered and inhabited.

Sacred circles are often marked out by practice. They can be circumambulated or cast. They can be spaces to sit together, passing a talking stick or peace pipe. They may be naturally occurring; a clearing in a wood or a cove upon a beach. They may be built for a purpose like a henge, fire circle or village green. In therapeutic work, groups might create a circle by choosing a location that has particular meaning or atmosphere, and by setting out boundaries of seating logs or by marking the centre with a fire pit. It is common to create a home circle at the start of a new group which can function as its base, both practically and psychologically. As the group returns to its circle repeatedly, this tends to amplify the power of the space, building associations and connections.

In the circle our attention is drawn to one another. The circle tends to condition self-awareness and collective process in the group. It conveys equality and invites interaction. The circle is often a reflexive space apart from activity, in which to discuss what has happened, integrate learning and allow a process to move on. Just as members of the group listen to one another, they see their own actions and processes reflected. The circle is a place to look forwards and to look back, but most of all to look in the mirror of others' reactions.

The circle has an inside and an outside, and a threshold that can be crossed. Entering the circle space is a transition. There are two territories: inside and out. We leave our weapons at the gate. Within the circle, individual defences loosen and a collective process is engaged. People relax. Outside the circle, we are free, undefined and wild, but we are endangered.

Themes of home are common motifs in group processes. This seems particularly the case in work out of doors, perhaps because as children we often enacted that basic pioneer instinct to build a camp in the woods. The sense of home can be broadly equated to the idea of the sacred circle. It bridges the mundane and the archetypal; the resting place of body and soul, a dwelling place, a temple and a heaven. Within the home, the home fires burn; the hearth, the sacred flame of family life, forms the centre of the space. Similarly, our passions are held within containing walls of cultural restraints, the heat of the community is concentrated and rendered useful within the circle. Alchemy unfolds. Sensing this energy, the group experience is sharpened. Entering the sacred circle is a flirtation with danger.

Security is bought at risk of xenophobia. Tribal identities transcend individual attachments, inviting a kind of freedom, but if the circle becomes a small-minded, localized territory, it may breed false security. The circle must therefore develop big-mind and become a gateway to the mystery beyond, a wormhole to a different universe. The Buddhist Dharma wheel turns in a continuous cycle, giving out teaching unendingly. This is the big-mind group, generous in its interaction with the world. Conversely, in the cycle of Samsara, the ordinary unenlightened mind rolls unrelentingly round its delusions, clinging feverishly to the passing flotsam of introspection.

Circles naturally evoke ritual. Whether we walk or sit, dance or stand in a circle, the form of the movement takes on a ceremonial quality. The circle expresses the current group's collective identity, but also looks to the universal qualities, representing eternity and wholeness. In the Zen tradition, the circle represents emptiness, the self-liberated enlightened state. In therapeutic work, as the talking stone is passed around, we connect to the greater circle of being. Living ritual is an amplification of attention and an empowerment of those who participate.

Shrines

The shrine is a focal point. It draws the attention towards itself, creating a focus for our emotional,

psychological and spiritual expression. In this, it is a manifestation of the sacred; not a part of ourselves, but, rather, something to which we relate. The shrine is an expression of the other. It is an object, a space or a construction which we can approach but which we do not become. Whilst the sacred circle is a boundaried space within which therapeutic work can take place, the shrine is an external focus of attention which can be encountered. A shrine may reflect identity, and even be a rallying point, but it cannot be a part of us. It can be a distillation of what we feel we are, but it is always externalized so that we can relate to it. In this, it can be used rather as one might place a sub-personality upon a cushion in therapeutic work.

Shrines occupy particular points in the landscape, often chosen for geological or natural features, or at the place where a significant event occurred. Holy places are then elaborated by use. For example, we might think of a sacred spring. Once the natural feature comes to be thought of as sacred, a shrine grows up around it, built in the original place and added to over the years. Initially the place itself draws the attention through its beauty or through an event which happened there, but gradually it increases in significance, and religious associations are built around it, until, in the minds of its devotees, it becomes a centre with the power to draw pilgrims or heal people.

Some shrines are built to deities. Others honour the dead. They are places to make offerings, leave symbolic objects, or engage in embodied practice like bowing or prostration. We can think of the wayside shrine. In the past, these have been prevalent at roadsides. They marked boundaries between towns, and provided places for travellers and locals to leave offerings. Now we see wayside shrines to people killed in road accidents. The ancient tradition takes on a modern form as the impulse to create memorials is common and universal. Other sacred places celebrate life. They may be creative and inspiring, touching the aesthetic sense.

Working therapeutically outdoors, the activity of creating a shrine can be a powerful expression of commonly felt experiences. If themes of loss and death are expressed in the group, creating a shrine together in a natural space may be cathartic and moving. This sort of work often seems to arise more naturally out of doors. Resources are close at hand and the reality of life, death and change are always present. The shrine can become the container for grief, and hold the collective anxiety as the group deepens its process of facing the existential realities of life. Yet, because a shrine is a place that is related to, and can be left behind, it does not require everyone to be involved equally in this collective expression. We can move closer and find comfort, or we can watch from a distance and depart, leaving our grief with the offerings.

Pilgrimage

The third form of sacred space is the pilgrimage or sacred journey. Pilgrimage is an activity common to many spiritual traditions. Travelling towards a spiritual centre or from shrine to shrine, the pilgrim seeks answers or expresses their faith through a religious journey. Pilgrimage is about a path with an end point. It is transitional, and can have something in common with initiation practices. Often pilgrimage involves a series of stages or stopping points along the way. Sometimes tasks may be accomplished or insights attained. Commonly, the path of the pilgrim is arduous, perhaps involving deliberate practices of devotion and even self-mortification. Pilgrims may prostrate as they travel or do penances. At other times, pilgrimage can be joyous.

Pilgrimage is purposeful, but the focus of attention often changes as the journey progresses. Initially, attention is commonly concentrated on the idea of reaching the end point. It is goal orientated. As the pilgrimage continues, however, the journey itself becomes more significant, sometimes to the extent that arrival at the destination is an anti-climax. The shift of orientation from goal to process reflects psychological maturation. Learning to hold a sense of direction, whilst being fully in the present moment, brings psychological well-being, and is the foundation of mindfulness. Finding the true goal of pilgrimage may thus actually be its purpose.

In the mythic journey, the presence of a supportive guide or assistant is frequently significant. The guide may be a messenger, accompanist or rescuer. He may be always present or may appear at points when he is needed. The guide metaphor offers the therapist models for how to be facilitative of the client in the therapeutic journey. Often a somewhat mysterious figure, the guide appears at the crucial moment, but may be absent at other times. This alternation of presence and absence mediates the traveller's struggle. It is often at times when the guide is absent that the person learns most. At the same time, an intervention at the right time can create a turning point in the process.

In pilgrimage, the sacred path may be something

which is set out by others, or it may be something which we discover for ourselves. The metaphor of the journey is widely used in psychotherapy. Life is a journey from birth to death, and the therapeutic process is a journey through the difficult terrain of the psyche. For this reason, in ecotherapy practice, the metaphor of pilgrimage provides a means to ground individual and group processes into actual pathways through the countryside.

Conclusion

Just as the life journey has easy and difficult passages, group processes involve many twists and turns. The metaphors which we have been exploring offer ways of expressing and exploring these.

One traditional representation of the life journey is the labyrinth. There is a famous labyrinth at Chartres which can be walked on certain days of the year. This circular pattern of mediaeval tiles in the cathedral floor takes the person who walks it on a path which meanders in and out, sometimes approaching the centre of the circle, which represents the spiritual goal, and sometimes moving away again to the outer edge. A few years ago I was lucky enough to visit Chartres on a day when the chairs were moved back to expose the stones. I walked the path, taking part in a metaphoric enactment of the ebb and flow of life as I walked closer and further from the sacred point in the middle. The path carries one along, so one has no choice but to surrender to the route and trust that eventually one will reach the holy place at the centre.

Labyrinths are found in many cultures. They bring together the sacred circle, journey and shrine. In this article we have explored the role of attention and mindfulness in developing a therapeutic framework for work out of doors. In particular we have identified how the practice of mindfulness, in its original form, is concerned not simply with developing here-and-now awareness, but also with developing a quality of attention which embodies an attitude of reverence towards all phenomena as dependent and impermanent. In our relationship with the outdoors, this can be thought of as fostering an experience of sacred space.

The concept of sacred space allows for several qualities of perception to co-exist. It encapsulates a sense of being held, whilst at the same time allowing an experience of encounter, distance and otherness. To explore this diversity, we took three examples: the sacred circle, in which attention is directed towards the group, developing a sense of containment and reflexivity; the shrine, where attention is directed to the other, be it an individual who is being remembered, a deity or spiritual truth which is being appreciated, or even the projected identity of the individual or group; the pilgrimage in which attention to process, change and impermanence focuses on a progression along a pathway which is real or metaphoric.

Creating frameworks for working out of doors requires fluidity if we are to address psychic as well as mundane phenomena. The opportunities for symbolization and analogy in this work are extremely rich, so there are many ways of conceptualizing it. This paper has raised themes which may be useful and creative. Being drawn from a number of spiritual traditions, the language and imagery of the sacred is pertinent to therapy, whatever the cultural background of those participating.

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Notes and reference

1 Buddhist psychology proposes six senses, see C. Brazier, *Buddhist Psychology*, London: Constable Robinson, 2003.

2 J. Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*, New York: Hyperion, 1994.

3 Satipatthana Sutta (Majjhima Nikaya 10 and Digha Nikaya 22).

4 See C. Brazier, 'Roots of mindfulness', *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*, 15 (2), 2013: 127–38 – Special Issue: 'How Mindful Should Psychotherapists and Counsellors Be about Mindfulness?'.

5 C. Brazier, *Buddhist Psychology*, London: Constable Robinson, 2003.

6 C. Brazier, *Other-Centred Therapy: Buddhist Psychology in Action*, Ropley, Hants: O-Books, 2009.

7 J. Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self: A Guide to Living Fully in Turbulent Times*, Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 2007.

8 See www.tarikitrust.org.