

Thresholds

Counselling with spirit

January 2024

‘This intricate blend of spirituality, ethics and community transforms the landscape of mindfulness into a thriving, multidimensional ecosystem’

– Page 9

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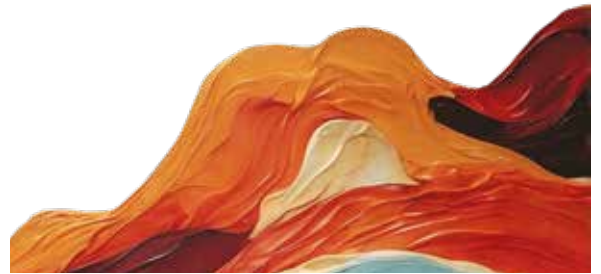
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The power of attention

When the world seems as troubled as it does today, and there's such a cacophony of voices that it feels impossible to find clarity, where do you turn? I find solace in the poem *Love* by Czeslaw Milosw.¹ Its opening lines, 'Love means to learn to look at yourself/The way one looks at distant things', express something about what happens in therapy: a relationship with yourself, via another, that extends out to the world. Simone Weil writes about 'absolutely unmixed' attention being akin to prayer, and calls for us to 'cure our faults by attention and not by will'.² For me, this is the very foundation of healing.

This issue gathers writers who, in different but interconnected ways, have something to say about this kind of love and this kind of therapy.

On p6 Nadia Saleem Syed writes about research in which she interviewed two men, Amar and Bandra, who have been meditating outdoors since childhood. They talked about the powerful cultural and ethical significance that mindfulness has for them, and how deeply this practice is interlinked with their spirituality. In *Toolkit* (p12), Gestalt therapist, Keith Duckett, uses the medium of sand to get curious about the fundamental set of movements we first make as babies. He draws upon the work of Ruella Frank and the philosophy of non-duality to reflect upon how bringing a sense of wonder to our movements has the potential to bring about therapeutic change. In *Reflections* (p16), Alastair McNeilage takes a poetic look at the role that reverence can play in facilitating this kind of attention in a therapeutic space.

On page 24, we get a glimpse into a process called 'deep mapping your square mile', which is about entering into intimate connection with the land around you. Samantha Taroni explains

how we can experience this via three centres: head, heart and gut.

All of these writers call for us to bring a particular kind of attention to the therapeutic process. Freud talked of the importance of 'free floating' or 'evenly hovering attention', something beyond a left-brain, judgment-based way of witnessing.³ The articles in this issue hint at the depths that this kind of attention can reach, and the 'correspondences', to quote from Samantha Taroni's article, that can be made.

In *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron writes that 'more than anything else, attention is an act of connection'.⁴ And, although we talk here of art and spirit, how we apply attention has been thoroughly examined from a neuroscience perspective too,³ as I discovered during a great conversation with psychiatrist and psychotherapist, Jeremy Holmes. You'll have to read the article to find out more, but as we start the new year, I'd like to share what I found most moving about what Jeremy had to say: he expressed a hope that our world can make better use of what we do in therapy – of the special, sacred kind of attention that happens there. Hear, hear to that. ●

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Inner me



We talk to counsellor **Caroline Blake**, about the things that inspire her

Tell us a little more about what you do

I am a licensed lay minister in the Church of England, as well as a counsellor. I took the plunge to go into private practice two years ago. My clients include people with no professed faith, as well as Christians and church leaders. My special interest is in supporting church leaders who are struggling with stress and burnout. Following a very difficult experience at a previous church, I undertook some training in religious trauma and spiritual abuse, and I now also offer support in these areas.



Is there a spiritual aspect to your work?

I believe that human beings are made in the image of God, regardless of whether they have any faith or spiritual beliefs. I think that spirituality is an essential dimension underpinning all therapeutic work, whether it is acknowledged or not. Clients, in their distress, are all seeking meaning, purpose and healing, and I see these as ultimately spiritual issues. As an integrative counsellor, I draw upon the main theoretical approaches. I explore issues related to faith or spirituality when the client raises them.

What moves you in life?

Where do I start? Acts of kindness, heroism and self-sacrifice, the unconditional love and loyalty shown by animals to their owners (my cat, Gordon, is my constant companion!), the beauty and healing power of nature, sharing with a good friend over a cup of coffee and uplifting worship in church.

Are there any wellbeing practices or rituals that sustain you?

I start my day with a cup of tea and have a time for prayer and reflection. I light a candle, read a passage from the Bible, or listen to a reflection on an app on my phone. I commit my day, and my client work, to God. This practice grounds and sustains me, especially when my workload is heavy or I'm feeling stressed. I live near Virginia Water in

Surrey and never tire of walking around the lake, appreciating its peace and beauty in all seasons. I also love watching so many happy dogs having a wonderful time splashing in the water.

Tell us about a mystical or memorable moment in your life

I was fortunate enough to go on a trip to Israel with a church group back in the 1990s. One of the sites we visited was the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem, traditionally believed by many Christians to be a possible location for the tomb of Jesus and the site of his resurrection. Having seen some of the other pilgrim

My special interest is in supporting church leaders who are struggling with stress and burnout

sites and finding them very touristy, I wasn't expecting much. After looking inside one of the tombs, I spent a few minutes sitting nearby, absorbing the atmosphere and listening to the sound of pilgrims singing in many different languages around the garden. Suddenly, I had the most overwhelming feeling that Jesus was there, next to me. I felt he was speaking to me personally, saying



my name, just as he calls Mary by her name in John's gospel account of the resurrection. It was so powerful that I burst into tears. It was an experience that's difficult to describe, but I knew that it was real.

Who has inspired you?

C.S. Lewis has had a profound effect upon my faith, having read his books and learnt about his life. I'm also inspired by people in my church who humbly serve others, giving sacrificially of their time, energy and gifts, without seeking any recognition. Often, they are facing their own struggles and difficult situations too. I'm also inspired remembering a wonderful lady called Kelly, who sadly died in her 40s of breast cancer, leaving a husband and two young daughters. Her love of life, courage, humour and faith shone through right up to the end.

Do you have a favourite spiritual book?

C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* played a key part in my own faith journey. I love the spirituality in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, but my 'go to' books are from Susan Howatch's *Starbridge* series, depicting fictional clergy and their spiritual journeys over a span of

60 years, from the 1930s to the 1990s. She's not only a fantastic storyteller but also manages to combine psychology and theology. Her characters grapple with spiritual breakdowns, and eventually come through to places of healing and transformation in their lives. I re-read these books every year and continue to find fresh inspiration.

A favourite quote?

There are many biblical verses I could quote that inspire me, but one of my favourite quotes is from Sam's speech in *The Lord of the Rings: the Two Towers* film. Peter Jackson adapted it from the book but kept the gist of it, and it never fails to move me: 'It's like in the great stories, Mr Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were, and sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something.'¹

A favourite piece of music?

It's difficult to pick out particular pieces. I enjoy listening to anything from classical, to pop, to worship songs.

Chopin's *Nocturnes* and Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* are some of my favourite classical pieces. I like any 1980s pop music as it takes me back to my youth! And there are a couple of worship songs that always lift me, including Stuart Townend's version of *The Lord's my Shepherd*.

What does the word 'divine' mean for you?

I see the divine in nature - God's fingerprints in creation. I see it in every person and, supremely, in the person of Jesus who said: 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.' (John 14:9) ●

Reference


- 1 The Lord of the Rings: the two towers [Film.] Peter Jackson (dir.) 2002.

Above left Caroline's morning ritual with tea and candle
Above right Virginia Water, Surrey
Left Gordon

Be featured here

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Mindfulness and the lifeworld

Nadia Saleem Syed shares her research into the cultural and spiritual significance of outdoor meditation

In today's fast-paced world, mindfulness and nature are increasingly acknowledged as sanctuaries. I wanted to take this understanding a step further by exploring how culture and spirituality shape our interactions with nature through mindfulness meditation. My choice of research was spurred by my own first-hand experience with the transformative effects of mindfulness on anxiety, as well as its positive impact on a family member's battle with depression.

My research focuses on the lived experiences of two skilled Asian mindfulness meditators residing in the UK. I used in-depth interviews to explore their childhood encounters with nature, and the associations between mindfulness, Buddhism and peak experiences. The findings are culturally significant as they offer a glimpse into the Eastern roots of mindfulness, often overshadowed by Western adaptation. Against a backdrop of mental health challenges and societal unrest, a focus on overcoming suffering through mindfulness in nature seems timely, and opens up new avenues for inclusive and culturally sensitive research. It also highlights the role of the community in shaping these practices.

Participants, Amar and Bandra, will serve as our guides into a labyrinth of spirituality and ethics that's anything but ordinary. Both identify as Buddhists, and their journeys reveal the inseparable trinity of mindfulness, Buddhism and nature. Forget the sterile secularisation of mindfulness for a moment; our duo plunges us into a realm where spirituality doesn't merely accompany mindfulness, it enriches it.¹

Responsibility and environmental conservation

The study identifies experiences of composure and a feeling of calm and wellbeing, which is deeply tied to nature. Amar and Bandra both expressed a sense of impermanence, which is a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, and brings a unique depth to their mindfulness practices. They also shared a sense of responsibility toward environmental conservation, a theme tied to the Buddhist virtue of loving-kindness. The flow of these experiences led to a loss of a sense of time, amplifying the therapeutic impact of mindfulness in nature.

Taking a phenomenological approach to the research enabled me to explore dimensions such as time, space and the corporeal experience of being. It shifted from merely measuring statistical effects to exploring the 'lifeworld' – the totality of one's subjective experience. I used van Manen's qualitative analytic techniques² to explore intricate aspects of mindfulness that are often difficult to quantify, such as the 'felt' experience of a breeze on the skin or birds chirping. It added a layer of richness to our understanding.

Nature's early influence

A connection to nature can often originate in childhood. Amar reminisces about the freedom he felt playing in Sri Lanka's tea and rubber plantations, which served as a playground for exploration and discovery. He described being in nature as 'looking at the unknown' and 'kind of discovering something new'. Similarly,

Bandra recalls how observing the lifecycle of plants and animals nurtured a sense of tranquillity, empathy and a passion for environmental conservation. He shared that watching 'the shoots emerging, trees growing, fruits coming and the birds eating them and enjoying when the flowers blossom' as 'uplifting and joyful'. This aligns with previous research suggesting that natural surroundings can instil love and kindness in children, fostering

environmental ethics and behaviour.^{3,4} These formative experiences shaped the participants' emotional landscapes, mitigating negative traits like anger or frustration. Bandra explained: 'We started being kind to the animals, birds, taking care of them. Adults try to destroy the environment, whereas children are very caring and loving. If children get that experience, which I experienced while growing up, they are more likely to grow up with kindness, empathy and a sympathetic nature.' This theme corroborates existing research, affirming that early contact with nature can evoke a

Amar and Bandra both expressed a sense of impermanence, which is a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, and brings a unique depth to their mindfulness practices

lifelong connection and foster spiritual growth.^{3,4} While the 'wild time'⁵ spent in nature is crucial for children's happiness, contemporary societal norms often restrict it.^{6,7} UK educational policies are shifting to include more outdoor learning,⁸ although adult schedules and curricular constraints can inhibit this.⁹

Buddhism, mindfulness and nature

Bandra captures the cosmic interconnectedness that nature brings to mindfulness, lifting the veil on our human-centric views. He describes a 'deep stillness, deep silence, like the deep ocean', adding: 'You start to become one with each other when you wake from that experience... It transforms and transcends every barrier in your brain.' Amar's experiences are no less profound. Imagine scaling a mountain, not for the adrenaline rush, but to drink deeply from the wellsprings of spiritual invigoration. He described it as 'climbing to a high point and looking out on this very far-reaching vista'. For Amar, this is a spiritual pilgrimage. His exploits epitomise peak experiences, aligning perfectly with existential theories articulated by the likes of Maslow and Clinebell.^{10,11}

The tapestry gets even richer when Amar's worldview can be seen echoed in Islamic teachings about a *momin* – a devout believer similar to a Buddhist monk. Amar emphasises that in experiencing mindfulness in nature, you try to be 'as minimally harmful as possible so that nature can flourish. That mutual support is really important.' The Quranic verses from *Surah An-Nahl* (Chapter 16, verses 68–69)¹² serve as a spiritual lens through which to understand the ethical life of a honey bee – a metaphor that both Islamic and Buddhist perspectives remarkably share. Just as the bee maintains purity while benefitting its environment, a *momin* embodies similar virtues of productive, responsible living. This Quranic narrative deepens the texture of our understanding: the bee seeks a home in



mountains and trees, reminiscent of a believer seeking refuge in stable, grounded communities and structures. The bee partakes of all kinds of fruits, but produces honey that is consistently pure and beneficial – just as a believer navigates life’s diverse experiences, yet remains steadfast in faith and virtue. The bee symbolises the obedience and submission that characterise a true believer. Finally, the healing properties of honey can be likened to the spiritual and ethical goodness that a believer aims to bring into the world.

As I integrated Quranic texts into my reflective process, the intricate spiritual and ethical tapestry became richer. Islamic doctrines, not dissimilar to Buddhist philosophies, champion an ethical existence intimately tied to nature. Both religious outlooks endorse a life of mindfulness, and it is often noted that the scope and universality of such practices are far removed from the secular mould they have recently assumed.

Amar and Bandra don’t merely ‘practise’ mindfulness; they live it. It’s imprinted in the DNA of their cultural identities and sense of communal belonging. Previous literature suggests that a sense of belonging is critical for emotional wellbeing.¹³ In this study, nature becomes the common ground that fosters this sense of belonging. It connects participants to their roots and a larger community that values environmental stewardship.

Moral conduct emerged as a pivotal theme in the study. Amar and Bandra both pointed out that their mindfulness practices, deeply rooted in Buddhism, are not just about self-improvement, but also about cultivating virtues such as compassion, selflessness and conscientious action. For instance, Amar’s decision to abstain from alcohol, aligned with Buddhist principles, shows the ethical influence mindfulness can have on a person’s life.¹⁴ There is a great sense of accountability and a moral compass that can guide behaviour. Moral conduct manifests as daily interactions that benefit others and the environment. This intricate blend of spirituality, ethics and community transforms the landscape of mindfulness into a thriving, multidimensional ecosystem. Welcome to a richer, deeper mindfulness – one that’s not merely lived but felt.

Overcoming suffering

Perhaps one of the most compelling findings was the role of mindfulness meditation in nature as a means to alleviate emotional suffering. Bandra, for instance, discussed how breathwork in the fresh air helped reduce anger: ‘If we go and take fresh air, we feel like coming back to our energy. The wind element – the air element – is very important because it revitalises, evolves and circulates the system. Otherwise, it gets very toxic.’ These insights align with previous studies on stress and aggression reduction through mindfulness practices.^{15,16}

Nature is not just a backdrop but an active participant in the mindfulness experience. Bandra suggests that nature itself can heal destructive emotions. As a

practice, it draws upon Buddhist teachings about the root causes of suffering such as desire, ignorance and resentment. Both Amar and Bandra acknowledge that meditating in natural settings promotes emotional stability and mental clarity. Nature’s influence in reducing stress hormones and improving parasympathetic activity is also supported.¹⁷

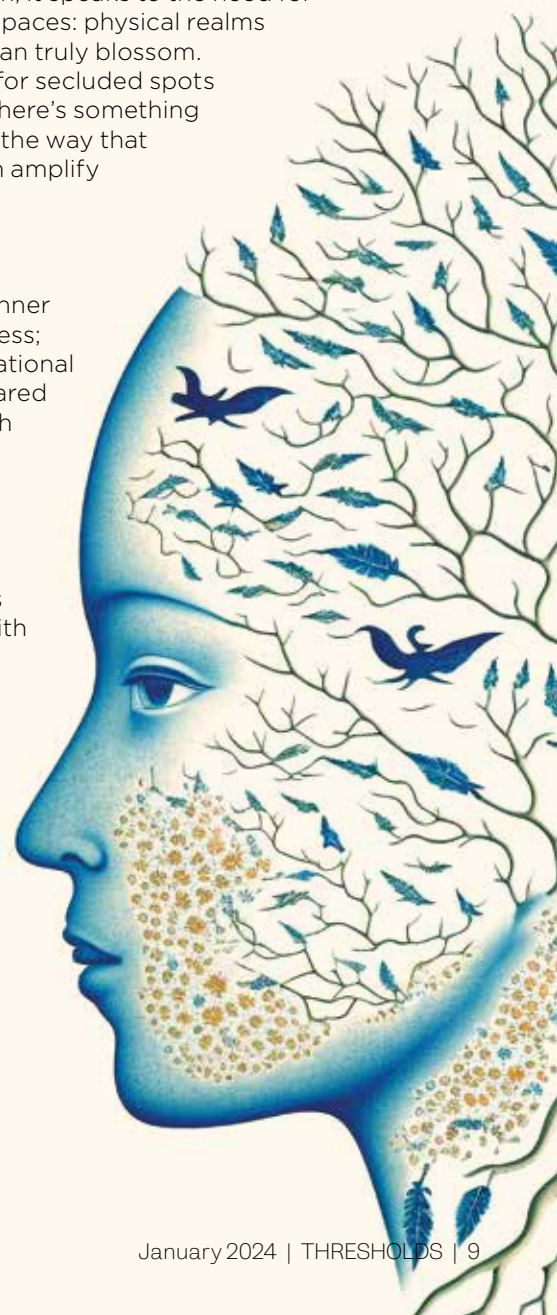
The lifeworld

Other unfolding aspects – spatiality, sociality, temporality and embodiment – are captivating and add intricate layers to the already engrossing narrative of Amar and Bandra’s mindfulness journey.

Spatiality: A discussion about mindfulness isn’t complete without dissecting the geography of the practice. Amar’s account presents the UK’s climate as an environmental variable, that can either catalyse or cramp an individual’s mindfulness journey. Let’s not dismiss this as mere whim; it speaks to the need for us all to find our sacred spaces: physical realms where our mindfulness can truly blossom. Bandra said he yearned for secluded spots like forests, suggesting there’s something almost primordial about the way that natural surroundings can amplify the experience.

Sociality: The texture of mindfulness, it appears, is not solely a matter of inner cognition or self-awareness; it is embedded in our relational webs. Amar’s tales of shared outdoor experiences with friends underscore that communal interactions could offer a broader, possibly even richer, palette of mindfulness. On the flip side, Bandra’s spiritual synchronicity with nature is an invitation to consider a different kind of sociality – a cosmic fellowship, if you will, that bonds us with all aspects of nature.

Temporality: Amar and Bandra touch on the paradox of mindfulness suspending the clock, stretching or compressing our perception of time. Bandra offered an intriguing claim that an hour’s meditation could feel like 20 minutes.



This throws a wrench into our clock-driven lives, suggesting that mindfulness offers an escape hatch from the tyranny of time.

Embodiment: Finally, the corporeal experience of mindfulness brings a tactile richness. Amar commented on the differing sensations between indoor and outdoor walking meditations, observing the uniformity of indoor surfaces, as opposed to the varied touchpoints available outdoors. This can either heighten or lessen a mindfulness experience. Bandra shared that deep meditative states make him feel 'like a cloud in a clear sky', suggesting a dissolution of physical boundaries.

These four dimensions elevate our understanding of mindfulness from a mere buzzword to a multifaceted, deeply resonant, human experience. They provide more than intellectual fodder; they offer a practical road map for enhancing the mindfulness journey, whether you're a seasoned practitioner or a curious novice.

Islamic doctrines, not dissimilar to Buddhist philosophies, champion an ethical existence intimately tied to nature

We are in an epoch where mental wellbeing is as precarious as the environment. The findings of this research serve as an unambiguous call to revisit our roots in nature and spirituality, fortify our emotional resilience, and rethink educational strategies.

This transformative process of mindfulness in natural settings can lead to unprecedented personal growth, resilience and a harmonious co-existence with our planet. It is not just a discussion; it's an invitation to a journey towards holistic wellbeing and ethical mindfulness. At this intersection, we find a road less travelled, but one that promises greater wellbeing and harmony with nature. The discussion doesn't end here; it echoes into the paths we choose moving forward. ●

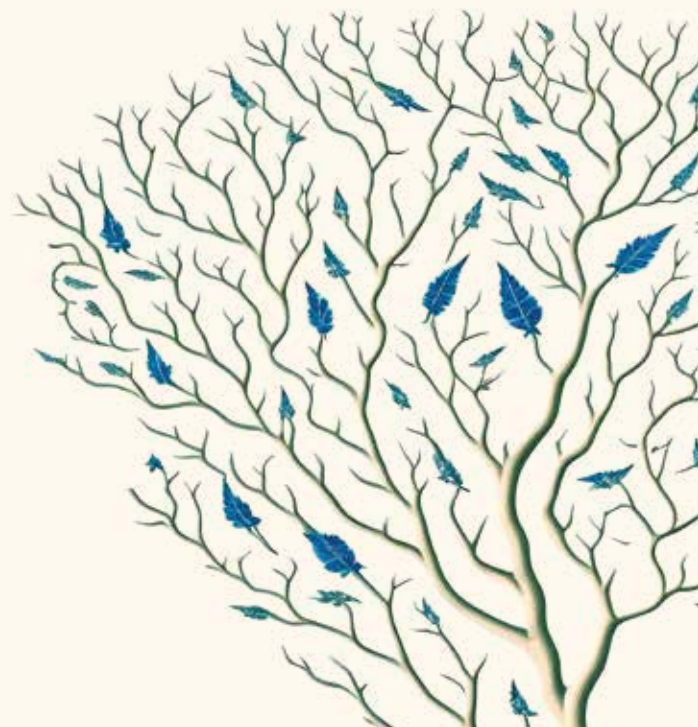
Biography



Nadia Saleem Syed recently graduated in Psychology with Counselling (BSc Hons) at The Open University. She mainly offers voluntary therapy in her community. Aspiring to be a psychologist, she is influenced by her father's philosophy: 'True victories are those shared with others, making life's joys meaningful.' She also has a business degree.

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The queen of complexes



José Luis Leal

José Luis Leal looks at the Jungian complex through the mythological lens of the Snow Queen's curse

Most of us will have experienced the feeling of having fallen under a spell at some stage. Something takes a hold of us and clouds our consciousness. We may know something has taken us captive and, unable to stop it, we become reluctant witnesses to its destruction. The storm passes, and as we regain control, we have to mend and repair the havoc that it created. When this happens, a complex has been activated.

Spiritual complexes

Jung described complexes as autonomous disturbances in consciousness, characterised by an intense feeling which is incompatible with our usual state of being. It displays a powerful inner unity, behaving like an animated foreign body living within us. Jung viewed our psyches as multipolar, having a vast array of characters and elements. He did not see this as pathological, but thought that a lack of understanding and failure to be in relationship with these aspects could create psychic conflicts. We can usually identify the complexes that activate an intense episode of rage or depression, a critical and destructive inner voice, or an aggressive aspect within us. However, there are other complexes that are more subtle and sophisticated. Spiritual complexes tend to come disguised behind a gentle voice. There are feelings of bliss and joy, and the accompanying attitudes seem generous and open-hearted, but the operating mechanism is the same: 'Where the realm of complexes begins, the freedom of the ego comes to an end, for complexes are psychic agencies whose deepest nature is still unfathomed.'¹

Possession and distractions

*The Snow Queen*² is a saga that

illustrates the journey that we embark upon to recover an aspect that has been possessed by a complex. I will use two brief excerpts from the story to analyse the origin and dynamics of spiritual complexes.

In the beginning of the story, a wicked goblin holds up a mirror that distorts reality for anyone who looks into it. The creature shatters it into a million pieces, and they fall into the eyes and hearts of people. In the story, the Snow Queen comes and takes away a little boy named Kay. She kisses him, freezing him to the brink of death, and takes him into her realm. Kay has a loving friend, Gerda, who embarks on a perilous and long journey to find and save him. In one of those episodes, an enchantress takes Gerda and makes her forget her purpose. She showers her with distractions and sends her on a pointless chase, asking different flowers for their stories. Each story confuses her more, making her forget why she was there, and strips her of her freedom.²

Spiritual complexes can freeze and disconnect us from the world. They also freeze our relationships by making us fall into spiritual bypassing, whereby we attempt to compensate for a personal shortcoming or challenge through a spiritual practice. We can be seduced, just like the enchantress seduced Gerda, and become possessed by these spiritual complexes. The seduction and possession disconnect us from the present moment, and isolate us in the spiritual realm. This can result in an exceedingly optimistic perspective of reality, detach us from human and material matters, and trick us into empty utopian promises. We may also develop a sense of entitlement based upon a false idea of having an enlightened state, or we could fall into dangerous episodes of denial.³ All of these will manifest in the same way: disconnecting our ego from reality, taking away our freedom, and doing so in such an unconscious and

camouflaged way that we will have a hard time spotting them.

Working consciously

Gerda represents an inner aspect which remains untouched by the complex, yet affected by its destruction. The episode with the enchantress can happen to anyone in pursuit of a spiritual path. There are many interesting, fun and seductive stories that amount to nothing. As therapists working with spirituality, part of our job is to strengthen the aspect in our clients represented by Gerda. We are called to question and challenge which spiritual pursuits could be dead ends, and to identify where transformation is halted and freedom is lost. Loss, confusion and pain are the gateways to embarking on a journey that will allow us to discover our complexes and work with them. For it is only through learning and relating to our complexes consciously that we can shine a light on them, and slowly melt their autonomous and unconscious nature. By doing so, we free much needed psychic energy from the lumps of ice that have frozen our hearts and sight. This releases our ability to relate and see the world for what it is, to be fully human, immersed in a story that has flesh, bone and spirit. ●

Biography

José Luis Leal has an MA in Jungian and Post-Jungian Studies from the University of Essex and an MSc in Systemic Psychotherapy from the Milton Erikson Institute in Monterrey, Mexico. He works as a psychotherapist in private practice with adults, teenagers and couples and has taught meditation workshops since 2005. José has been training with Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estés since 2013. Email: j.lealgomez@gmail.com

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Sand work for wellbeing

Keith Duckett shares his reflections on introducing experiential sand work in a hospice day care setting

Sand work is like marmite,' warned my clinical supervisor when I was checking out some of my ideas with her, 'people take to it or they don't, but it's always emotive in some way.'

Our day hospice was having a revamp. My bereavement support team had been invited to devise a session on emotional wellbeing, as part of a new 12-week 'Living Well' programme, which would include other aspects such as physiotherapy, psychology, complementary therapy and chaplaincy. The service manager suggested a group work approach. This tallied with my gut feeling: I too wanted to avoid a predominantly psychoeducational style, and try something more experiential and interactive. If this session was to be an introduction to our service, I was keen to foster the insight that what we do is more than just 'talking' therapy. To facilitate something physical and tactile, under the rubric of emotional wellbeing, would also help me lean closer to the 'being' part of

wellbeing. I was reminded of Joseph Campbell's words: 'People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.'¹ The idea of 'what brings you to life' is something that I have explored in a previous article about reflective practice.²

Holistically experiential engagement

I had recently discovered Ruella Frank's work on the 'six fundamental movements'.³ According to Frank, before we had learned how to speak, we already had a language, a 'moving vocabulary of micro-movements' in which babies 'experience themselves *yielding-with, pushing-against, reaching-for, grasping-onto, pulling-toward, releasing-from* the other'. Some of her words had set me thinking about the relationship of these movements to psychotherapy and spirituality:

...we meet and are met by the world in a variety of ways that span from lively animation to the dullness of fixation...

Moving-feeling bodies are central to the co-creating of one's experienced world. To be kinaesthetically awake is simply the feeling of being alive...

The six fundamental movement patterns continue to be essential to all our interactions throughout life, supporting the most basic elements of animated psychological functioning...

The vocabulary of six fundamental movements offers a way to search the depths of experience as expressed on the surface...³

My interest in Frank's model encouraged interaction and holistically experiential engagement, and acted as a potential starting point for exploration of the emotional and sensate dimensions of being. This would also enable an implicit integrity on my part as facilitator, since my conception of therapeutic practice was gradually transmigrating in the direction of the non-dual traditions; but more of this later.

By moving one's hands in individual sand bowls, the six movements could be illustrated, mimicked and experimented with.

Ruella Frank credits Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (the originator of Body-Mind Centering®), with the inspiration behind her six movements. It was only after the embryonic idea had come to me of developing an activity based around sand and movement that I came across Linda Hartley quoting Bainbridge Cohen:

I see the body as being like sand. It's difficult to study the wind, but if you watch the way sand patterns form and disappear and re-emerge, then you can follow the patterns of the wind or, in this case, the mind.... Mostly what I observe is the process of mind.⁴

Later on, in her introduction to Body-Mind Centering®, Hartley claims that 'movement, perceptual, psychological, intellectual and spiritual growth are all profoundly influenced and supported' by our essential movement patterns.

Stillness within movement

In order to introduce the six movements to a group, I adopted a few changes in terminology; changes which I felt would be more suitable in this context. For instance, 'yielding' became 'relaxing', 'pushing against' became 'pressing against' and 'releasing from' became 'letting go'. As I imagined inviting the group members to participate, I sensed the need to name a seventh movement - that of 'stilling'. Clearly, there could be an arrival at a place of stillness in between any two of the six other movements. However, there might also be a kind of stilling *within* any one of the other six - characterised

by poise, balance, relaxed concentration, equanimity and self-awareness. For this sense of stilling and stillness-within-movement, I was drawing on my personal experiences of practising yoga, tai chi, meditation and badminton; and my knowledge of cricket techniques from working as a junior coach. The main theoretical backing for the idea came from the following:

1. Frank herself gives a rationale for labelling 'stilling' or 'stillness' as a distinct 'movement'. She quotes Henri Bergson, the French philosopher: 'Every form has its roots in a movement that traces it: a form is nothing but recorded movement.'³
2. Equally, Hartley captures a yin-yang quality of mutual indwelling between stilling/stillness and the other movement styles. She describes within each cell a 'pregnant rest', in which 'this experience of restful being is at the source of all activity' containing a 'feeling of great power and omnipotence'.⁴
3. From my training in Gestalt pastoral counselling, I see a need to recognise moments ('movements') of stillness or stilling within, as well as between, each 'stage' of Gestalt's cyclical/wave model of figure formation/contact/satisfaction. We could call them moments of 'digestion' – micro-digestion within each stage and macro-digestion as part of the 'fertile void' stage.^{5,6}
4. Finally, the wisdom tradition that has been inspiring my own spirituality within recent times is non-duality. In the personal sphere, I am particularly inspired and nourished by the work of Rupert Spira.⁷ The professional therapeutic sphere was where I had first discovered this perspective, in the work of Martin Wells and Jon Welwood.^{8,9} In summary, non-duality could be described as an awareness of stillness in 'being' or 'consciousness' – a form of knowing.

Reflections on the first session

Being in a day hospice day room meant that I was not able to set the therapeutic frame in the same way as I would with an individual or therapy group session. My gut feeling upon briefly meeting the group of eight patients whilst things

were being set up was that we needed to get straight into the work, to alleviate the slight anxiety that hovered around the appearance of the mysterious storage boxes containing sand. We went straight to the pictures as background on the screen behind me, with the simple introduction that I would guide participants through six movements that are the basis of our wellbeing, and are like a language that we learnt in the womb and infancy before we could speak. After going through the movements once, we repeated them at a slower pace, with longer pauses, and then invited a brief feedback discussion. There seemed to be an ease to the silence that descended; one even closed her eyes. Three nurses hovered to provide assistance but were barely needed. Participants described the session as relaxing, thought provoking and calming. One said that they felt a warm connection to a spiritual home.

To facilitate something physical and tactile, under the rubric of emotional wellbeing, would also help me lean closer to the 'being' part of wellbeing

The main thing I learnt from the session was its potential to create a sense of safety. Last year, one of my psychotherapy clients had been anxious about visiting her sister in Australia for three months after her husband had died. She was concerned about leaving the safe spaces of therapy and home behind, and going through the less familiar (and therefore less safe) spaces of airport lounge, flight, temporary accommodation and travel. She had just retired as a teacher and had been given a handmade pencil case as a gift. Long story short, we had explored taking some of her safe space with her in the pencil case – which became known as 'SSiPC – Safe Space in a Pencil Case'. It included mementoes and tokens of her husband, therapy and home. It worked so well that she was inspired to take up needlework, and make more for other bereaved folk like

her. I asked her to make some for our day hospice members – patients who might want to take a 'safe space' with them as they went for appointments, hospital stays and holidays. My intention had already been to offer them as a gift at the end of the sand session, and to use them as a basis for explaining that the first and main thing we aim for in counselling is the establishment of therapy as a safe space. I realised that the sand work had illustrated this too: people had quickly felt comfortable, as the key words in the feedback demonstrated.

Transmigrating into non-dual practice

There will have been five more sessions of this sand work by the end of this pilot project, and I plan to fine tune the presentation, and further reflect upon the responses to the practices, and how they challenge and change my intentions. I also expect that it will be a vehicle for honing my transmigration to practice informed by non-duality. The work of Judith Blackstone¹⁰ points me through this somatic sand work, towards a personal exploration of what she calls 'non-dual realisation'. Blackstone marries intersubjective psychotherapy and Asian non-dual philosophies in her approach. She explains:

'I have found that not just psychotics, but also high-functioning normal adults generally experience themselves... as living in only a part of their bodies. Readers can test this out by taking a moment to inhabit your hands. It is likely that you will find that you are not already in your hands; that to inhabit your hands requires a volitional act.'¹⁰

As we embody ourselves in and through our hands in the sand, exploring the six movements, we have access to something that Blackstone herself recognises as being missing in her two primary theoretical roots: 'the somatic component of invariant organisations of experience.'¹⁰

However, she explains that:

'As we are able to inhabit our body all the way through its internal depth, the barrier between ourselves and our environment dissolves, and we find ourselves in non-dual consciousness.'

A session outline

Contracting and introduction

First, we take some time to clearly contract with the group, with an emphasis on creating a safe space in which participation is optional. I then introduce the idea of working with the sand, explaining that there will be a series of photos to illustrate a suggested set of hand movements to explore.

Invitation

I ask the group to experiment with movement and sensing by sharing the following words and images:

Before we could speak, we already had a language.... In the womb, and as infants, we learnt the language of movement... These six basic movements are the essence, the foundation, of our wellbeing.... They can be felt as we move our hands through the sand.... We'll pause at each step along the way, so that we can really notice the sand, our skin, our feelings, our sensations.... As best we can, we sit comfortably and upright...

First, we knowingly relax our hands into the sand; sinking, resting... PAUSING HERE...



Then, we knowingly take hold; taking...and holding... PAUSING HERE...



Then, we knowingly press against the sand; feeling, pushing... PAUSING HERE...



Then, we knowingly pull towards us; hugging, embracing, pulling near... AND PAUSING HERE



Then, we knowingly reach out; extending forwards, outwards... PAUSING HERE...



Finally, we knowingly let go, releasing, allowing the flow... PAUSING HERE...



Therefore, the release of somatic holding patterns and the increasing ability to contact or inhabit the internal space of the body leads towards non-dual realisation (page 76) ... [because...] it is important to understand that these holding patterns are not, at root, physical. They are constrictions of our being.¹⁰

I picture this transmigration as a 'dropping down' through layers of narrative, cognition, behaviour patterns, relationships and perceptions, emotion and sensation, towards the

body/breath. This is both spiritual and psychotherapeutic in orientation. Referrals that come as a result of the sand work day hospice sessions may be a little more primed than they would otherwise have been, to join me in a therapy flavoured by non-duality. We will have, after all, shared a descent, through movement, into the visceral experience of our hands in the sand. ●

Biography



Keith Duckett is a psychotherapeutic counsellor working as team leader and lead therapist in the bereavement support team at a NHS specialist palliative care centre. He has a developing interest in yoga and non-duality, having worked in an EAP and an IAPT service, as well as for many years as an Anglican priest and healthcare chaplain.

Look out for Keith's *ten minutes with...* interview at *Thresholds* online: www.bacp.co.uk/thresholds

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Energy, vibration and resonance

Ruthie Smith

In this column, writers talk about how spiritual experiences shape their understanding of the world

Ruthie Smith shares how an awakening led to her working as an energy psychotherapist

A musician from a young age, I've always been fascinated by resonance, vibrations and energy. I quickly learned to 'read' people's tones, picking up on the discrepancies between what was said, and the actual sound of the voice which often communicated quite the opposite. The natural wisdom of a sensitive little person is challenging for grown ups. When children blurt out their truths they are often punished or schooled into more acceptable, compliant behaviours. I became frozen with trauma, couldn't speak or find my voice. I didn't even realise back then that I dissociated to survive. While I had a sense of 'knowing' I had no clue what to do with this, which resulted in a split between my internal life and how I presented to the world. I spent decades experiencing debilitating anxiety and lack of confidence, constantly second guessing and censoring myself, worrying about people's judgments. Life was full of 'shoulds' and 'oughts'.

Heart-opening experience

I always longed to connect with my soul. After having had psychotherapy as a client, something was still missing. My sister was agonised by schizophrenia and I wanted to understand more about the roots of her suffering, so I attended a talk about meditation and peace by Dzgochen Buddhist master, Dudjom Rinpoche. As he spoke, the gentle lilt of his voice transmitted a direct experience that there *is* a way out of our suffering through awakening into our true nature.

My heart suddenly opened fully and expanded, radiating with feelings of love and compassion. I connected with myself as a being of embodied light. In that moment, I experienced the sacredness of the fifth dimension (5D) – what some call 'heaven on earth'. I cried non-stop for four hours afterwards, and this heart opening experience changed my entire outlook. Having internalised the idea of 'original sin' since childhood, the feeling of goodness I experienced when I had a small glimpse of enlightenment was such a relief. Everything opened out into an expanded space of peace, purity, light and compassion. I felt at one with 'the all', came home and knew who I truly was. This experience also gave me the certainty and confidence that we all have this capacity to awaken. Incidentally, the Buddha's name, Kuntuzangpo, means 'always well'.

Glimpses

Music and meditation provided easy ways of bringing such 'glimpses' into everyday reality, but in the 1980s, a sense of the sacred was perceived as 'pie in the sky' by many therapy colleagues. At that time, before mindfulness existed, I had a deep hunger to integrate spirituality into my therapeutic work in an embodied, authentic way. I struggled to find my voice, fearing I would be thought crazy if I spoke about soul in the early supervision groups. It was easier to keep quiet and avoid the shame of being different. Like so many in the process of individuation, I went through a journey to overcome the conflict between what I felt was expected of me, and my deeper spiritual calling. Life continued to be a roller coaster, as I flipped in and out of egoic and soul states of consciousness.

Radical shift in practice

So, what steps led from there to me working as an energy psychotherapist? Replacing the idea of psychopathology, with my experience that we are

A copy of Ruthie's book, *Energy Soul Connecting and Awakening Consciousness: psychotherapy in a new paradigm*, is available for review.

If you would like to review it, please contact thresholds@bacp.co.uk

fundamentally whole, created a radical shift in my practice. Alongside studying and teaching psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and attending spiritual retreats, I undertook various trainings in subtle energies, energy and colour healing, and the chakras. At one point, my therapy room was literally split in two, with my therapy chairs and couch in one half, and a healing space for colour therapy in the other. There, I practised etheric massage using Aura-Soma essences of the Ascended Masters. I so longed to bring these worlds together.

I was very grateful when I met Phil Mollon who introduced me to energy psychology. I undertook further training which revolutionised my therapy practice. Energy psychotherapy draws upon all the skills and knowledge inherent in conventional psychotherapy, working at the interface of the wisdom and intelligence of the body, mind and subtle energy system. This synergy of body-mind-energy facilitates astonishing effects. I worked weekly with an energy therapist to clear the dense trauma of low vibrational energies, and integrate shadow aspects (including archetypes, past life and transgenerational trauma). Gradually, as I healed and cleared my energy field (which remains a work in progress), I stopped following others 'who knew'. Instead, I developed the confidence to trust my own guidance, becoming my sovereign self. ●

Biography



Ruthie Smith is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist (The Bowlby Centre) and an energy psychotherapist with 35 years' clinical experience, including 10 years as a principal psychotherapist and supervisor within the NHS. She is the founder of The Flame Centre in London, which specialises in trauma, and is currently the director of a postgraduate clinical training in energy psychotherapy, hosted by Essential Therapy Training. www.theflamecentre.co.uk

Reverence

Alastair McNeilage shares his poetic understanding of the role reverence plays in the healing journey

Reverence is not a word that we commonly bring to psychotherapy and counselling, yet to allow its presence can have a transformative influence on the way we work.

Reverence is a bowing in humility; a deference and surrender, in awe, to a current of healing beyond our own skills, experience and knowing. Reverence denies our separateness. Its presence in the way we hold our clients' suffering is an indication of the deepest sense of connection in which we are no longer fooled by our own cleverness, nor by any ability on our part to command our healing and wholeness.

It indicates something that belongs to the conscious flow of life and, in that moment, we are granted access to the unity that lies beyond the painful drama of our suffering. Reverence brings a deep respect, not just for the anguish, pain and tragedy of our clients' isolation, but for their longing for infinite, unconditional love. This longing acts as a compass point to the true north of wholeness, and can guide the very fabric of our existence. It is a movement through the sanctuary of the past towards the freedom of fullness, which is there waiting in the vast and wordless memory of the human heart.

Self-compassionate awareness

As practitioners, if we place what we do and say at the centre of our clients' healing, then we have exiled their suffering from the immensity of a deeper meaning and imprisoned it in the personal. It is true that this 'doing' of ours does allow transformation to take place. It can help the client to develop the compassionate self-awareness that can meet their wounding, and dissolve the claustrophobia of isolation and shame in which it is often held. Integration like this has the potential to bring freedom and wholeness to clients' lives.

So, of course, we must bring all the practical skills and experience we

possess to help free the client from pain. Yet suffering also points, ultimately, towards a more profound freedom that would allow the fullest and deepest healing to be known.

Suffering and wholeness are not separate but inextricably linked and deeply entwined in a unitive holding field that embraces both client and counsellor on their journey through disconnection to connection. It is the therapist's reverence for this holding field, expressed through their body, heart and mind, that points both prodigal client and counsellor back towards their true home, in the unity to which we belong.

As practitioners, if we place what we do and say at the centre of our clients' healing, then we have exiled their suffering from the immensity of a deeper meaning and imprisoned it in the personal

It feels true to say that few clients want to hear about the deep significance of suffering when they are in the midst of trying to survive it but, in time, we can look back and see the value to our growth and spiritual enrichment that suffering has brought us. We could say that reverence deeply expands the landscape in which we and the client come to see their self-limiting behaviours.

A dance between fragmentation and wholeness

Those of us who are privileged to walk reverentially beside our clients, as they examine the nature and meaning of their suffering, witness a dance between fragmentation and wholeness. This exposes all suffering as lostness to an infinite field of interconnection and oneness.

The origin of our suffering – the very first intimation of separateness – begins in the mystery of our arrival and the possibility that the thread that links 'me' as baby, child, adolescent, adult and elder could extend even further back. Perhaps this goes beyond the womb, to a unity of being in which we knew the infinite presence of a loving oneness.

Can that be true? What points to a 'yes' is that, from the first breath to the last, the human heart opens instinctively in response to the presence of love, and instinctively defends and closes in response to the drama of its disappearance.

Somehow, our buried knowledge of this sacred kinship lies behind every experience of loss and wounding, and behind every action we take in our lives. Our constant search for some version of that once known love expresses itself in our daily lives, in the myriad ways in which we seek happiness. Our longing can be seen in the body's wish to free itself from tension and become more relaxed. It can be there in the cry for freedom from the unendurable that lies behind murderous rage; and it can be there, more intimately, in the wish for affirmation and the search for meaning.

A single longing

As practitioners, we have learnt about the journey of a human being from fragmentation to wholeness through a wide variety of different lenses, each of which carries the light of its own understanding. They range from object relations, attachment theory and pre- and perinatal therapies, to psychoanalysis and the mystical schools of the great religions. Behind all the labels and lenses we use to identify a client's dilemma, is the single longing for boundless, unconditional love. All human behaviour has behind it this sacred nostalgia. It is in the intimacy of this shared loss that we meet the strategies created by the intelligence of the client's (and our own) ego in response to the shock of conditional love. These

Reflections

strategies have just two directives – to keep us away from the pain and self-shame of our suffering, and to attract from the world around us anything that will make us feel better about ourselves. It's a tough, self-defeating job. Our self-shame turns the world around us into a fearful, judging and hostile place. As we try to be the person people want, we shrink away from being fully ourselves, for fear that all that is unlovable within will be exposed.

The three places

This place of young wounding, with its own narrow bandwidth of consciousness, is the first and most reactive of the three places from which we meet the world around us. It carries very particular signatures that tell us when the client has been triggered there: they will be flooded by feelings of fear, powerlessness and hopelessness, loneliness and shame. They will likely experience a sense of catastrophe about what is happening to them, and a despair that it will always be like this. From the start, a therapist's reverence for the hidden longing for the infinity of love can weave its way through the client's healing journey. As their wounding rises out of the shadows towards the light, it can feel met and seen for the first time: a homecoming for which it has always longed.

This warmth of welcome, modelled by the practitioner, can begin to grant the client access to the stronger authority of their own self-awareness and understanding: the second place. Here, clients begin to have access to a more accepting and expansive present time awareness with which to hold their own wounding. This offers a more empowered choice of ground from which to meet life. Their sabotaging life statements no longer have the power to define who they are.

The third place from which to meet life is the place that already knows about our connection to something greater than ourselves. We could call it the 'wordless depth of the heart'. Some traditions call it the 'soul'. From here, we can search life and our suffering for its teaching and meaning. At last, love is free to enter the same room as suffering. These three places, as they enter further into relationship, move us through the imprisonment of reactivity to a more

spacious response to life, and finally to the resonance and freedom of a deeper communion with self and others.

An instinctive desire

The more the practitioner can allow clients to be reconnected to the timeless justice of their wish for wholeness, the more liberated they become. The true meaning of the 'need' in their 'neediness' is revealed. We see that, as James Finley said, 'the innocence of our young hearts never deceived us'.¹ Our strategies for survival carry within them the longing for a return home – not as a geography, but as an instinctive desire to reclaim a state of unity and connection within ourselves. As we emerge, this wish can be heard again in a new search for meaning.

It is for the therapist to hold a reverence and respect for the longing behind the distress, violence, lostness and desperate manipulation in the client's strategies.

We could say that reverence deeply expands the landscape in which we and the client come to see their self-limiting behaviours

Our reverence as practitioners brings us into relationship with the one who suffers behind the suffering itself. It enables us to offer what the client's own place of wounding has wished for – the warmth, understanding and kindness of a deep care that can at last dissolve shame, and liberate them from the illusion of their own unloveableness.

In turn, clients can at last take the sublime risk of embracing their vulnerability in a new openness to life. Just as a flower unfolds in surrender to the morning light, the body can respond to loving connection by relaxing and softening. In response to this new feeling of safety, the heart opens and becomes more trusting. The mind, too, exhales as the client's reverential awareness gently touches their own suffering with a compassionate curiosity. What was pushed

away can, in part, be held as a lostness and invited in from the cold to the warm hearth of kindred belonging.

Two pilgrims

The client, through the reverence of the practitioner, has created in themselves the light of a welcome for which that young, wounded exile has always longed. In this dance of sacred reciprocity, the heart, mind and body of the practitioner may also feel deeply affected. There may be a sense that the client's suffering belongs to the therapist too. In that moment, client and practitioner disappear and there are just two pilgrims in the room, held in the resonance of two expansive human hearts. The healing that takes place in this intimacy opens a person to the reality of life expressed in beauty, harmony and joy. It points towards a living benevolence, and places suffering in the context of relatedness and unity of connection.

Once we free ourselves from this identification and sense of separateness, we sacrifice our individuality to this oneness. We have returned to our original symbiosis. My own personal sense of the poetry and beauty of psychotherapy is that, as we free ourselves from all identification and sense of separateness, we offer our individuality to this oneness in all our fullness of being. We are home again to love, to our self and to all life. ●

Biography



Alastair McNeilage is a core process psychotherapist and supervisor in private practice. He is also author of *The Lost Way*, a book about the deeper meaning of the Beatitudes. Email: awaytobetogther@hotmail.com

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Student voices

Juliette Sweeney considers the role spirituality can play when navigating transitions



experience these transitions in our lives. For example, beginning therapy can be daunting for the client, especially if they have never experienced therapy before and have no idea what to expect, but it can be equally daunting for the therapist. Sometimes there can be apprehension over meeting a new client or developing a therapeutic relationship.

I remember how it would feel to be carried from the car to my bed while I was half asleep – so much so that I would pretend I was still asleep at times just to get that comfort

At the other side, the client may be coming to the end of their sessions and, especially where short-term therapy is concerned, feel a sense of desperation at the prospect of losing support. Endings can also stir up attachment trauma for the client.² They may choose to cut off sessions prematurely: 'I'll leave you before you leave me'. The therapist can also have a difficult relationship with endings. They may have built up a solid therapeutic relationship that provides a sense of comfort or security for both therapist and client. They may carry their own trauma directly related with their experience of endings.

Regardless of our unique perspectives on this topic, one thing is for sure, endings are inevitable. By design, as humans, we encounter life and death on a daily basis. As uncomfortable as it can feel to acknowledge, this truth sits outside of our control. Spirituality can play an important role in how we learn to accept that.

Believing in a presence much bigger than ourselves can bring a sense of comfort, similar to the feeling a child experiences when they know they have the love and security of a parent taking care of them. I remember how it would feel to be carried from the car to my bed while I was half asleep – so much so that I would pretend I was still asleep at times just to get that comfort. It didn't matter what was happening around me, as long as I was safe in the arms of my parent.

The belief that you are alone in navigating difficult endings can lead to a sense of despair and ultimately depression. Sometimes to hold the belief that you are being 'carried' through challenging times can bring comfort. The *Footprints in the Sand* poem comes to mind.³

As we settle into this new year, may we develop a greater appreciation for the beginnings we experience that have been planted by the seeds of our endings. All the best for 2024! ●

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Biography

Juliette Sweeney is a student therapist in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy (MSc), an author and a writer (BA Creative Writing). She writes about the vulnerability of marriage on her blog, *Really Married*: www.reallymarried.co.uk and runs online wellbeing journaling sessions through Pen Therapy: www.pentherapy.co.uk

The reality of beginnings and endings

It has become a family tradition to stay up on New Year's Eve and watch the midnight celebrations in London on TV from the comfort of our home.

Within the space of a few seconds, we transition from the end of one year to the beginning of another, and it is always a surreal feeling.

When considering the relationship between beginnings and endings, we typically associate one with opportunity, and the other with loss. But what if we were to hold both in the same regard? Could we recognise equal value in holding space for endings in our lives as we do beginnings? For example, the lessons gained from a relationship that has run its course could allow us to gain a new perspective or a job that can no longer offer us the security we once experienced may show us what we truly value, and need to seek out when considering future opportunities.

Beginnings and endings are also all too familiar within the therapy room, for both clients and therapists.¹ Using immediacy is an effective tool to help address transference, and create open dialogue in relation to how we

The secular spiritual zone

Jeremy Holmes talks with Amy McCormack about the artistic and sacred nature of psychotherapy

‘I sometimes describe myself as an agnostic atheist,’ said Jeremy Holmes, introducing the themes in his latest book *The Spirit of Psychotherapy*. ‘In other words, I’m an atheist but I don’t fully believe in my atheism.’

The psychiatrist and psychoanalytical psychotherapist, who is also medically trained, has specialised in attachment theory throughout a 50-year career which has included researching, writing, practising and teaching.

Much of Jeremy’s psychotherapeutic outlook, and indeed his understanding of spirituality, has been informed by neuroscience, and specifically Friston’s free energy principle (Friston 2010).^{1,2} He described this as a bottom-up/top-down model that humans use to process information.

‘Our senses are constantly providing us with information about what is going on in the world, but we can become flooded with this information, and the brain doesn’t like chaos. The brain likes to know what’s going on, so it has to draw on pre-existing models of the world and of relationships, but these are in need of constant updating.’ A therapeutic experience, he

explained, has the potential to take this influx of information – or ‘free energy’ as Karl Friston, the founder of this theory named it – and to work with it in a different way.

Jeremy said: ‘If we can play with this free energy and reorganise our mental architecture then we can develop better models of the world, and the way we do this is through collaborative work: through conversation, through another.’

The clothes the clients are wearing, the way that they communicate with us, the way they speak to us, the way they sit in their chair, the stories they tell. Everything is taken as valuable and there to be worked with

He argues that both psychotherapy and spirituality represent attempts to deal with ‘radical uncertainty’. Both attempt to find ways to ‘bind’ free energy – or unorganised information – and they represent parallel strategies for processing it through human collaboration and connection.

‘The way religion deals with unbound free energy is through religious precepts, seeing unbound free energy

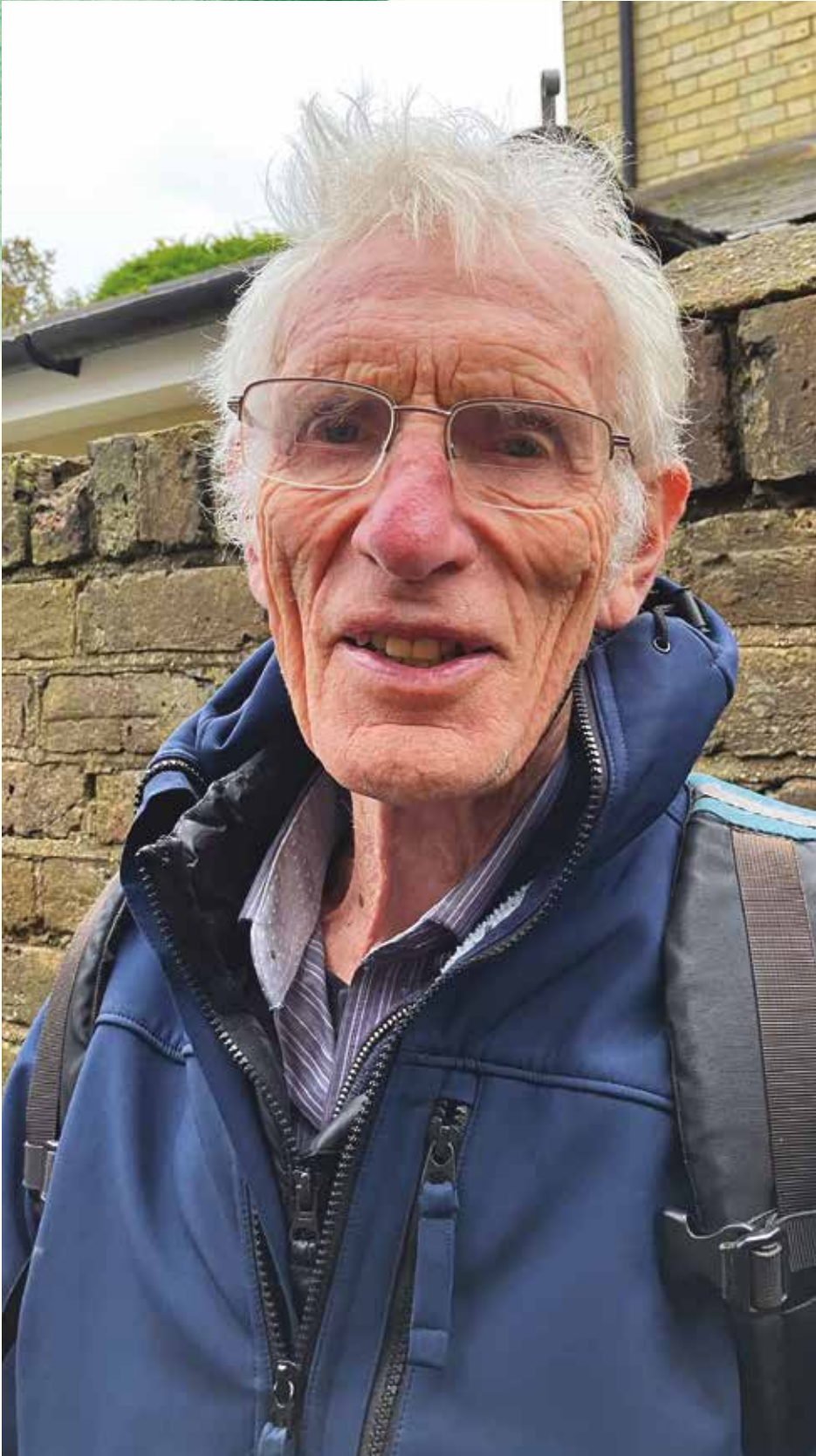
as manifestations of a God who moves in mysterious ways that we don’t understand,’ he said. ‘The way in which psychotherapy deals with unbound free energy is to share it with another person and, of course, the most important evolutionary aspect of religion is that it’s a collaborative, cooperative enterprise which enhances fitness.’

Describing himself as an ‘elder’ in the profession, Jeremy has turned his attention towards capturing the ways that psychotherapy and spirituality ‘intertwine’. He is interested in how a therapeutic space can act as ‘a secular spiritual zone’ or ‘sacred space, free from interruption’.

Also at the heart of Jeremy’s outlook is the idea of therapy as an art form. He co-edited a third edition of *The Art of Psychotherapy*, following his friend Anthony Storr’s death. A fourth edition will be released in early 2024.

‘I see psychotherapy as an artistic process. An everyday artistic experience could be cooking your dinner or telling a joke, or a story, or it could be a more formal artistic experience such as drawing a picture, playing some music, or dancing, singing or acting.’

‘In all those activities, there’s a total focus on trying to use and follow your own experience in the service of whatever you are doing. I think we are doing something very similar in therapy, although the ‘experience’



here is countertransference, or tracking one's own inner thoughts as they are brought into being by the encounter with the client.

'We are drawing on our own 'present-moment-ness', to use a Buddhist term, in the service of our client in a therapy session, and trying to create some kind of a whole. A therapy session has a beginning, a middle and an end, and it also has a fundamental theme, just as a dance, picture, or even cooking your dinner, has one.'

I've always occupied a transition zone between an interest in religion and a repudiation of it

The idea of therapy as art is connected with that of spirituality being present in everyday experiences. Jeremy draws upon the example of the philosopher, Spinoza: 'He was ex-communicated from the Jewish faith because he held a secular spiritual view that the deity of everyday life and materiality of everyday life were coextensive. In other words, he saw that there is spiritual meaning, beauty and an aesthetic dimension which applies to every aspect of life.'

In much the same way as an artist, a psychotherapist makes full use of everything that takes place within a therapeutic hour. 'The clothes the clients are wearing, the way that they communicate with us, the way they speak to us, the way they sit in their chair, the stories they tell. Everything is taken as valuable and there to be worked with,' he said. Jeremy highlighted the 'cultural contribution' that therapists make by working with the fabric of life. For him, this is how spirituality manifests itself in a therapeutic exchange.

'Every aspect, however horrible it may seem, is all part of humanity and one needs to approach it

in a non-judgmental way. I have always drawn on that in my countertransference reactions and my intuitive, you might even say, poetic reactions and free associations to the material that the client brings. In my twilight years, I now feel a lot more confident about doing that, and feel that is the right thing to do.'

To make greater sense of this secular spiritual stance, Jeremy embarked on a research project in which he carried out in-depth interviews with a range of people from different faiths, and none.

'I've always occupied a transition zone between an interest in religion and a repudiation of it. I think I was very moved by interviewing people from this huge range of faith backgrounds,' he said.

He described the participants as 'people whose psychotherapeutic path was a religious one, rather than having come through the consulting room.' Jeremy said that his interest lies, not in people's belief systems or 'cosmology', but in the therapeutic role that religion can play and its potential to act as a support: 'I found that religion had changed their lives and saved them from psychological distress,' he said. 'I think something does happen in religious epiphanies when people suddenly realise that they can re-organise their whole experience of the world with the help of a religion.'

Another question Jeremy sought to address was whether spirituality makes a difference in therapy and he found the answer, again, in the 'artistic' dimensions of the work. 'Spirituality is a lived experience – feelings of awe, connection, hearing an inner voice and drawing on these to provide comfort, meaning and purpose,' he said.

'This is the art of living. Likewise, psychotherapy praxis, what actually goes on experientially in the consulting room, as opposed to psychoanalytic or other theories, is what counts when it comes to changing people's lives.'

Researching and reflecting on these aspects has left him feeling more confident about his artistic responses, and the rightness of them. 'I think it has to some extent shaped the way I work with clients and the way I would encourage my supervisees to work with clients,' he added.

There is an overlap between secular sacredness in therapy and biodiversity, green politics and climate change. We need to have a secular sacred view of the world we inhabit, as well as the world we are working in as therapists

Questions of morality also arise in this secular spiritual zone. Jeremy said: 'There's always been a bit of an issue for me around the question: "Can you be a good therapist and a bad person?" because I don't consider myself to be a good person. One or two therapists I have met are good people, but an awful lot aren't. Most of us are the usual mixture of good and bad.' He concluded that it is 'putting the badness to one side or making good use of it to understand our clients' sense of badness', that makes therapy

possible. 'We can use ourselves in a creative way in a 50-minute therapy hour in a manner that can be reasonably morally sound,' he said.

Working on the book helped Jeremy to 'create a bridge' between his understanding of the therapeutic process and his views about our planetary crisis: 'There is an overlap between secular sacredness in therapy and biodiversity, green politics and climate change,' he said. 'We need to have a secular sacred view of the world we inhabit, as well as the world we are working in as therapists.'

'The antithesis of collaboration is individualism. This is an atomised, individualised society and it seems to me that the bond that the therapeutic relationship consists of is an antidote to that. It's the beginnings of creating a 'we-go' as opposed to an ego. Some people call it a 'two-getherness'.

In all that Jeremy says, there is a call for the psychotherapeutic professions to play a more culturally central role: 'Without counselling and psychotherapy, our culture would be diminished or, conversely, if we could only listen to the voices of counselling and psychotherapy, then we would hear things that would help us to begin to create a better society than we have at present.' ●

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Biography

Jeremy Holmes is Honorary Professor at the University of Exeter and was, for 35 years, medical psychotherapist and consultant psychiatrist at UCL and then in North Devon, UK. His books include *The Oxford Textbook of Psychotherapy*, *John Bowlby and Attachment Theory* (2014), *Attachment in Therapeutic Practice* and *The Brain has a Mind of its Own* (2020).

Jeremy's book *The Spirit of Psychotherapy* will be released in July 2024. The fourth edition of *The Art of Psychotherapy* is out this month.

Dreams and the spirit

Alistair Ross



Alistair Ross explores the therapeutic potential of dreams

Freud's seminal *The Interpretation of Dreams*¹ set the tone for the 20th century that had just begun. It is based on many of his own dreams and self-analysis. In it, he asked the question: 'How do we make sense of the complex desires, good and bad, we encounter in us and others?' These found a unique expression in dreams, which have played a crucial role in the collective past of the human race. Jung understood this as the collective unconscious, a repository of psychic ideas, images, symbols, traditions, archetypes and stories. Dreams appear in most religious traditions, and can precipitate unique spiritual experiences. They have a liminal, numinous dimension and can also be therapeutic. The difficult part is finding just the right or 'good enough' interpretation or interpretations.

A specific dream that I had comes to mind and, as I recollect, I'm aware that it is unusual, even by my standards. It was a dream of a warm summer's day, with an azure blue sky and a gentle, cooling breeze. I was walking with a friend in the vast expanse of Sutton Park in nearby Sutton Coldfield. Walking past some bushes, I saw a sudden movement and, on investigating, discovered a bronze coloured, female, common Boomslang snake, a species normally found in Africa. I thought we ought to pick it up carefully and find a safe place for this lonely snake, who found itself a long way from home. Having grasped it behind the head, I passed it to my friend who handily had a snake bag waiting. As my friend took it, she grasped the wrong part of the snake. With its head now free, the snake could turn and bite my hand. Which it promptly

did. Four needle sharp fangs punctured my skin, pumping in a large dose of toxin. Having once encountered a female Boomslang snake in real-life while in Malawi, I knew their toxics were slow-acting and so I had some time on my side. What happened next was a bizarre debate with my friend. Should we go to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, where the waiting times were usually so long that I could be dead before I was seen? Or should we drive to a School of Tropical Medicine in Liverpool or London, which would hold the right anti-venom? We decided on Liverpool because we couldn't work out how to pay the congestion charge or the ultra low emission zone (ULEZ) in London.

Freud placed great emphasis on symbolism and sexuality. Moving beyond the manifest or literal content, he sought to encounter the latent content. So, looking at the dream, there is potentially a great deal of sexuality involved: two people in a garden (of Eden); bushes, phallic serpents, puncturing, agony (or ecstasy), life and death moments. All offer plenty to work on in my therapy, where no doubt further meanings would emerge. Jung would emphasise the presence of archetypes and the feeling texture of such a dream.² What is important in a dream is less the narrative we construct to try and make sense of the insensible, and rather the sensations, feelings and textures we encounter. Whatever the therapeutic implications of this dream are, every dream has the potential for a spiritual encounter. If the spirit of God, gods, or the universe are at work in us, they too are in any form of the unconscious, or out of awareness experiences. How do we discern

this often overlooked dimension? Some people say they never remember dreams. We know they do dream, but don't have a suitable recall mechanism. Yet, it is something that can be learnt. Here are some simple steps:

1. Decide you want to remember a dream. You never know what dream will turn up. That is the part of the excitement.
2. Write it down as the first thing you do on waking. A notebook and pen at the side of the bed are helpful.
3. Don't try to make sense of it as you are writing it down, as you will already be editing out aspects, or toning down those that don't fit with the narrative you may already be constructing.
4. Focus on the feeling states that you recall. Pay attention to feelings that are embodied. Replay events and see if there are other feelings, lurking at the edges, just waiting to be discovered, then expressed.
5. Intentionally ask 'What does the spirit or Spirit want me to discover?'
6. Allow space, don't rush. Let things, words, ideas and feelings fall into place.
7. Write these down after the written summary of the dream. Such a meaning may not come straight away, but could be important as the future unfolds.

Happy dreaming! ●

Biography

Alistair Ross is Associate Professor of Psychotherapy at Oxford University and Director of Psychodynamic Studies. His recent books include *Introducing Psychodynamic Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Open University, 2019) and *Sigmund Freud: a reference guide to his life and work* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022). Alistair's research focus is on spirituality and psychoanalysis. Email: alistair.ross@conted.ox.ac.uk

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Creative self

Deep mapping: *a healing tool*

Samantha Taroni writes about how exploring the land around us can deepen our self-knowledge

Human-ing' is something we do in a context, in place. We inhabit a corner of the world and make sense of life from there. I developed a practice that I call 'deep mapping in your square mile', as part of the intuitive creative arts practices I offer, because I believe that how we connect with that corner, and what we bring to it, makes a difference in all the decisions we make and actions we take. How humans do their human-ing on the planet at this point in our history is clearly a matter of deep concern and worthy of attention. This article explores how I work with the elements of a deep mapping journey within my therapeutic community, The Soul Shed.

If we were beginning a deep mapping journey together, the first thing I would ask you to do would be to locate yourself within the square mile where you live. This area does not need to be scientifically accurate, so I may suggest that you shift the boundaries a bit so that it has a body of water and some woodland within it, if possible. The task would be to imagine yourself within the physically mapped field of your environment – as a human being, living in place. From here, your journey of self-discovery would unfold. Between our sessions, I would invite you to walk in your square mile, to take photographs and to journal. Within our sessions, we would take these experiences into a deeper creative enquiry.

Your square mile

Although I have created my own synthesis for therapeutic application, neither the 'deep map' nor 'your square mile' are my own ideas. Both coined by Mike Pearson, 'your square mile' is inspired by a Welsh spatial notion (*y filltir sgwar*), and refers to the connection a human might have with the place they know intimately, through living there over time.¹ As for a 'deep map', Pearson suggests it's both cultural and historical, and necessary to represent an experience of place adequately.¹ Since first encountering these ideas in *Caer Llan* with Sally Mackey² in 2004, I have been exploring how I can apply them more widely. What has unfolded is an inner and external journey which I offer to anyone who wants to come back to this felt sense of connection with the place where they live. It is helpful to conceive of this map being created, represented and expressed in multiple ways, and of the physical terrain being experienced as the site of a process of meaning making.

In our sessions together, I would share some somatic breathwork practice with you, which would orient you to felt sensing – a way to a more present awareness of your sensations and how you are experiencing yourself as an embodied organism. It would also honour you as a three-centred being (gut, heart and head) with access to instinctual knowing, heartfelt responding and open-minded curiosity. This way of understanding the human experience is rooted in enneagram teachings.³ These three distinct embodied kinds of experiencing can be 'sites' for new connected experiences of awareness to arrive. I call this 'emergent connectivity', wherever of these three places it arrives in your body. It is your creative intuition.

Creative self

An orientation of correspondence

Being in correspondence with the landscape and other organisms around us is an act of self-restoration. It generates a deepening appreciation of life interconnecting each time we do it. Here, I borrow from the work of another explorer, Tim Ingold. He contrasts two kinds of thinking – ‘a thinking that joins things up, and a thinking that joins with things.’⁴ Correspondence describes an orientation to the more-than-human world, and other organisms’ ways of being. The benefits of an ethos of correspondence are threefold: it is a process, it is open-ended, and it is dialogical.⁴ In this orientation, reductive categorisation and objectification of the external world is redundant because it is an experiential dead end. To live our human lives in correspondence is to take part in life unfolding: to become a part of both a human and more-than-human story. My book *Take It to the Trees*⁵ came from a year immersed in correspondence with the trees in my own square mile, increasingly coming to believe that they are re-sourcing us as humans in so many ways, day to day; and that their way of witnessing and supporting our human existences largely goes unacknowledged and unappreciated. I was altered by spending time with trees in this way.

Being in correspondence with the landscape and other organisms around us is an act of self-restoration

In our deep mapping journey, as you get to know the trees in your square mile, there would be an invitation to explore how you experience them, and how you experience their powerful, still, witnessing of you. How is the presence of a silver birch different to behold than the presence of an oak tree? And how do each of these trees play their own parts in both defining and living in correspondence with their locations?

A legacy of connection

To live in this place of deep call and response, between our self and the wild, results in witnessing becoming a resource. It can be helpful to turn to poetry to better grasp what this kind of full bodied attention to the world around might offer us. In Mary Oliver’s poem *Wild Geese*, she writes:

‘The world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things.’⁶

She is expressing an experience of coming back into belonging and relationship with the land we dwell upon. Author and storyteller, Sharon Blackie, writes movingly, too, about our roles as guardians and protectors of the earth in her book *If Women Rose Rooted*: ‘We are not separate from the Earth; we are a part of it, whether we fully feel it yet in our bodies or not.’⁷ My work takes as its foundation that intuitive creative practices are a powerful way for us to find our way back into this connection.

I might encourage you to choose a body-based theme for your deep mapping journey. For example, to notice, as you walk in your square mile, the instinctual pulls in your gut, either towards or away from an area, organism, or physical structure. I would encourage you to take your phone with you and, once experienced, to photograph these places of attraction and aversion.

A reclamation

This piece of work can reconnect us to our instinctual knowing. Nature offers us a wonderful opportunity that has often been sidelined because we spend so much time, busily focused, inside buildings. When you are out walking, and taking your time about it, you will be drawn along some pathways, and find yourself avoiding others. Sometimes, this will be a choice, and other times automatic. It can be so interesting to slow down and pay attention to that happening. Your gaze might alight on a particular detail in a tree, or your hearing might respond to some bird song. Your nose might pick up the scent of the earth or some sap from bark, or your body might be alerted by a movement in the undergrowth. There are so many ways your human organism will be subtly regulating itself and orienting as you take yourself on a walk. Noticing what is going on, and staying with yourself as you experience it, is allowing yourself to trust your being in the world as it unfolds and happens.

On your deep mapping journey, the environment offers your being possibilities that are revitalising. Your response to places within your square mile can offer a gentle way to get in touch with your somatic experience in real time, and opportunities to open and tend to neglected parts of your human capacity. In our sessions, I would offer you a guided visualisation to attune to sensation in your belly space, your heart space and your head space, and ask you to explore in your square mile, responding to leadings from these parts of you – the instinctual pulls and resistance within your belly, the feelings in your heart, as the curiosity of your open curious mind. This might be as simple as taking photographs of the features and things and moments that move these parts of your being. Your sense of your being as a receptive instrument can grow in confidence by having its innate wisdom acknowledged in this way.

By practising deep mapping in a square mile of inhabitation, participants are likely to become more

engaged in the rest of their lives. Using the body to map, the heart to connect, and the imagination to make meaning, are processes of active engagement. Ingold describes this engagement as generative and life-giving.⁸ I would go further: it feels enlivening, sensual and joyous.

Using the body to map, the heart to connect, and the imagination to make meaning, are processes of active engagement

Of course, this practice is only separate from the rest of life in the sense that it is demarcated in time and space. When we notice how the environment complements us and furnishes our needs, we are likely to approach it in renewed ways. A person is likely to be changed, incrementally, by the process. This, of course, is significant for our social lives since, as humans, we also act as environmental resources for the other humans we meet. So, the fruits of a deep mapping practice will also inadvertently ripple into your wider life. These next words are from Annie, a participant in a deep mapping journey:

'I have always found solace in the beauty outside my window, but the deep mapping journey allowed me, surprisingly quickly, to be *of* nature, to be in relationship and communication with nature. The state change is from myself as grateful observer to participant, embedded and fully connected – like I plugged into a circuit. In parts of my life, I have always struggled to be really here. This process allowed me to rest in presence without any leaning forward to the next thing.'

Being present with your three-centred being has been at the heart of this deep mapping process. You've needed to use your curiosity and receptivity to relate from your head centre, rather than the analytical or categorising brain. However, there is a place for the cognitive in this journey, and I would like to end by bringing this quality of the mind into your deep mapping journey. The mind of a relaxed human can be curious and open to new thoughts and ideas. Often, these emerge spontaneously once the body has become more sensitive to surroundings, and the heart and feeling centre are also engaging in this relationship of correspondence with the external. In your deep mapping journey, I would encourage you to learn the different names of trees, flowers, places, and to consider giving them new names or nicknames, yourself.

Naming our landscapes

From what I inferred earlier about categorising and objectifying nature, it might seem as though using the mind to learn the names of trees or flowers or other aspects of the environment might be an exercise in separation; to apply labels could box things off from our direct experience of wonder and lose something of their beauty and vitality. This would indeed be a reductive, categorising kind of a naming process. However, there is another aspect of naming that literally summons a thing

into being. Naming or nicknaming an animal or a child's toy, for example, makes them more intimately real to us, and allows us to be in relationship with it in a different way than when it blends into the background, and is indistinct from the other animals or toys. Rob McFarlane and Jackie Morris are a writer and artist, respectively, whose project has been to reclaim nature words into the cultural imagination. In the introduction to *The Wild Cards*, they underline this belief that:

'Names matter. Good names, well used, unlock mystery, grow knowledge, and summon wonder. And the right name for a thing can be a portal to a wholly new perspective on the thing itself. If you can name it, you are more likely to notice it; if you notice it, you are more likely to love it; and if you love it, you are more likely to care about saving it.'⁹

Humans who actively root themselves in location, engaging with the more-than-human world as an embodied three-centred organism, develop a strong sense of belonging to the earth. They are likely to become a life-giving generative force in their own life and within their wider communities. We, as a species, face important questions about our future and the future of our planet. It is in the spirit of contributing to this conversation about the purpose and contribution of humanity, that I share this practice and these ideas. ●

Biography



Samantha Taroni is founder of The Soul Shed, an intuitive creative arts project. She is a trauma-informed coach, breathwork practitioner and SoulCollage® facilitator. Immersed in the enneagram wisdom teachings and in exploring curious ecological spiritual threads through her practice, she works one to one, and in virtual and local community. www.thesoul-shed.co.uk

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The network

BACP Spirituality division news and information, including updates from BACP's Spirituality division Chair, a network round up, and reflections from Executive Committee member Cemil Egeli

From the Chair

Light within darkness



It is October and I am writing the Chair's page for the January edition of *Thresholds*. Right now, I am struggling to make sense of the world, and of how to create meaning when the horrors of humanity are pressing heavily on my heart. Conflict seems ubiquitous and an all-consuming force on earth in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ukraine, Israel and Gaza, to name but a few.

I cannot lie to you. I have found the last few weeks challenging, more challenging than normal. I feel confused, disorientated and frozen by all that is happening in Israel and Gaza. I sit at home in comfort, only too aware of my position of privilege, of living, for now, in a safe and secure environment. There seems too much pain in the world, and I ask myself whether I am foolish to hope for a planet where we can feel at one with each other across the magnitude of divides and differences.

I know that the inhabitants of this earth have historically always been in conflict, generating wars which lead to hate, fear and anger. I am lucky, I was born in Europe at a time of relative peace. This perspective gives me hope, on a personal level, that I can still determine to create value and cherish the person standing in front of me. Anne Frank (1929-45) wrote: 'It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and

impractical. Yet, I cling to them because I still believe, despite everything, that people are truly good at heart.'¹

Buddhism taught me that light existed within darkness. Out of the very depths of inhumanity, my own humanity was born. Where is peace?

Buddhism taught me that light existed within darkness. Out of the very depths of inhumanity, my own humanity was born

Let us take the opportunity, represented by a new year, to restore, rejuvenate, replenish and redetermine. Teachings from the *Book of Psalms* tell us to actively seek peace: 'Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.' (Psalms 34: 12-13).² I know, therefore, that I am right to stand up and call for peace at the dawning of a new year. It is in our nature to seek co-operation, friendship and faith in each other. Archbishop Desmond Tutu lived in a country where he was surrounded by

conflict. His words give me courage: 'My humanity is bound up in yours for we can only be human together.'³

This year, we will continue to forge ahead with raising the profile and highlighting the importance of the Spirituality division. We will meet as an Executive in February, which will enable us to celebrate and take stock of our achievements in 2023. We hope to connect with you in 2024. Perhaps you would like to attend one of BACP Spirituality's networking events. We welcome your thoughts and ideas, and would love you to share with us your experiences of belonging to the division.

Peace be upon you and may every hardship come with ease.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kath Lock-Giddy'.

Kath Lock-Giddy
BACP Spirituality Chair

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What's new



Books

Weaving the Paths of Buddhism and Psychotherapy: the practice of human being

This book by Helen Carter is an empathic guide to integrating Eastern and Western wisdom traditions that share the common goal of easing distress. Following the so-called 'mindfulness revolution', there has been a surge in interest as to how Buddhism's overarching view on suffering may enhance therapeutic practice. This book is not just a clinical text; it is a first-person account of one Buddhist therapist educator's lived experience of bringing Buddhism into the very personal and relational experience of psychotherapy.

www.routledge.com/Weaving-the-Paths-of-Buddhism-and-Psychotherapy-The-Practice-of-Human-Being/Carter/p/book/9781032464930

Blogs

Cinema and the PCA – Transcendence

Cai Draper explores the world of person-centred film theory. The article draws parallels between transcendent experiences in therapy and those encountered while watching movies.

www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/blogs/2023/06-november-cinema-the-pca-transcendence-final

Media

Prompted by the BBC Radio 4 podcast *Uncanny's* recent TV release, Cemil Egeli reflects on its relevance to supernatural phenomena in counselling

BBC's *Uncanny* details stories of supernatural experiences encountered by its guests and discusses cases of hauntings.¹ Psychological experts argue in a somewhat binary way for 'team sceptic' or 'team believer', and the host Danny Robins moves between the two. Watching these debates, I was struck by the use of psychologising to explain these ghostly experiences from both positions. It reminded me of my childhood fascination with the concept of ghosts, and of reading *A Ghost Hunter's Handbook* by Peter Underwood who stated that, when hunting for ghosts, we must look for natural explanations before assuming the supernatural.²

It is important to recognise that there are religious, spiritual and socio-cultural factors in how we may understand or experience a plethora of phenomena and entities. I often sense the words *supernatural* or *paranormal* can be laden with value judgments, as they may infer that some of these occurrences are not natural or indeed normal. I wonder if there could be a spiritual hierarchy of beliefs at play here, perhaps rooted in what Tuhiwai Smith may call 'Western essentialism'³, or by what Jung describes as the 'disease of rationalism'.⁴ From a counselling perspective, Thomas Rabeyron explores the idea of ontological shock that clients may face when experiencing what western culture may define as paranormal or anomalous experiences.⁵ He calls for counsellors to have a greater understanding of these experiences while (perhaps similarly to *Uncanny*) drawing on a range of psychologising factors which may attempt to explain some of them.

Whilst *Uncanny* is produced seemingly for its entertainment value, complete with spooky music and dramatisations, it does highlight aspects of human

ghostly experiencing. In one episode from series one,¹ a guest who struggled with mental health difficulties, which were arguably the outcomes of the hauntings rather than the cause, described feeling 'brushed off' by counsellors. She talked of assessing their receptiveness before being able to share that she had grown up in a haunted house, which leads me to wonder more generally about the openness to unexplained phenomena in the counselling profession. If clients describe their experiences through seeing ghosts, does the cause of this paranormal phenomena really matter any more than the causes of any other details a client may bring? Robins himself states in the podcast that, whatever people believe, it is important to recognise that the impact that these experiences have is real. This leaves me with a number of questions about how we sit with the ghostly encounters our clients may bring:

- How competent would we feel to work with this and how would we navigate these experiences ethically?
- Would our supervisors be open to these discussions and how might risk be assessed?
- How would we work if ghosts were present or manifest in our therapeutic spaces, rooms or work?
- Could these experiences also, as Jung might suggest, be gateways to unconscious knowledge?⁴
- How receptive can we be to these experiences without necessarily having to understand or explain them?

References

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- 4 Jung CG. *Memories, dreams, reflections*. London: Fontana Press; 1995.
- 5 Rabeyron T. When the truth is out there: counselling people who report anomalous experiences. *Frontiers in Psychology* 2022. [Online.] www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8764292/pdf/fpsyg-12-693707.pdf (accessed 8 November 2023).

Connect with spiritually minded colleagues

Could you hold a BACP Spirituality network meeting in your area?

BACP's Spirituality division is looking to create a wider network of spirituality events, and is looking for facilitators who may like to run the groups in their area, or to get involved in running online events. Meet some of the people who are getting involved across the UK.



Sukhi Sian, who set up a BACP Spirituality network meeting with fellow co-ordinator, Myira Khan, talks about what it's

been like to hold the meetings

What does being a network facilitator involve?

Working alongside another facilitator to hold an online meeting with therapists interested in spirituality. The meeting is a reflective and learning space, with the opportunity to meet and network with like-minded people. You don't have to be an expert in any topic around spirituality but rather passionate or interested in spirituality and its place in therapy, with an openness and curiosity to facilitate the conversations that may emerge in your meetings.

How much time does it take?

You can give as much or as little time as fits with your other commitments. Usually, network facilitators will facilitate between one to three meetings a year. These can take place on a time and day that suits you. At the moment, meetings tend to take place at weekends but this is due to current facilitator availability.

Meetings can also be held in the week, during the day or evening, if this suits you better.

What kind of skills do you need?

Skills vary from individual to individual, and everyone brings strengths that are unique to them. It can be helpful to be organised, know how to work within time boundaries, and how to create a fair amount of time and space for people at the meeting to share. Listening

My favourite part is when delegates share that this experience is the first time that they have talked openly and freely about spirituality within their counselling career, and some therapists have been practising for more than 30 years!

skills and an ability to reflect with others are beneficial, as is being able to create and hold a safe space, while working alongside another facilitator to prepare and choose themes for the session. Presentation skills can be helpful but are not essential.

What's your favourite part of the role?

I love the opportunity to hold a space for practitioners to talk about spirituality. My favourite part is when delegates share that this experience is the first time that they have talked openly and freely about spirituality within their counselling career,

and some therapists have been practising for more than 30 years! I find it heartwarming knowing a seed has been planted with what feels like permission, and a sense of liberation to take away with them.

Why become a facilitator?



The latest network co-ordinator to join the team, **Charlotte Hastings**, will be holding her first meeting in the Sussex area soon. Here, she

introduces herself and shares what made her get involved

Please tell us about how you work as a therapist

I am a Brighton-based systemic-informed, psychodynamic practitioner with a private practice called Kitchen Therapy, which works to address the relational and spiritual aspects of how we feed ourselves.

What made you sign up to be a facilitator?

I wanted to be able to feel an active member within the division as a whole, and I was looking for a sense of connection and engagement with fellow therapists in what can be a lonely profession. To be able to share ideas and questions of practice within a spiritual framework will be both exciting and essential shared nourishment. I look forward to seeing you at one of our meetings!

If you would like to get involved please contact communities@bacp.co.uk

For future events, see: www.bacp.co.uk/events

Research

Maurya RK, Jain S, Grey B, Clarfield J. Evolution and process of spiritual awakening: a grounded theory study. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 2023; 23(4): 906-918.

This study used a constructivist grounded theory approach to explore, examine and develop a grounded theory of spiritual awakening conceptualisation and process. The authors used the interview data of 34 eminent spiritual teachers who

have written books on spirituality, led spiritual retreats, and conducted lectures and trainings on spiritual quest.

 onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/capr.12618



Work on your race and culture core competency

This Professional Development Day (PDD) aims to widen your knowledge and awareness of race and culture as universal aspects of self and all clients, while acknowledging the centrality of concern for working effectively with clients of diverse heritage such as people of African, African-Caribbean, South Asian and East Asian descent and multiracial clients.

This workshop will be led by Mamood Ahmad, a therapist, author, trainer and founder of The Anti-Discrimination Foundation (TADF) (www.tadf.co.uk). He has extensive experience of client advocacy, client perspectives of therapy, intersectional and racial-cultural client work, diversity standards, research and race-based group work. He specialises in developing standards for training in diversity, intersectionality and anti-discrimination practice.

The three 45-minute sessions will take place over the course of a morning, each followed by Q&A and will be organised as follows:

Session 1: Introducing core concepts and challenges, and situating your own collective and intersectional position.

Session 2: Reflecting on your own racial-cultural context, racial-cultural identity and attitudes towards the social construct of race.

Session 3: Asking why core competence is essential and what it takes to be core competent, while acknowledging the continuous process of learning.

The core competence framework, which was developed under the TADF collaboration, will be introduced to help situate your learning.

The PDD will take place online on Thursday 28 March 2024. To book, see: www.bacp.co.uk/events/opdd280324-online-professional-development-day-race-and-culture-core-competency-are-you-ready

Urgent action needed to address ethnic inequalities

BACP welcomes a call to address ethnic inequalities in access to NHS Talking Therapies in England published in a landmark report by National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health and NHS Race and Health Observatory.

The report found that psychotherapy services need better tailoring to meet the needs of Black and minoritised ethnic groups. Based on 10 years of service data and patient experience, the report also found that despite initiatives to redress longstanding inequalities, people from racialised communities continue to experience longer waiting times, lower rates of treatment following referral, and worse outcomes from NHS Talking Therapies, compared to White British groups.

BACP Third Sector Lead, Jeremy Bacon, said: 'This is a timely reminder that the racial inequalities laid bare by the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movements continue in people's experiences of NHS psychological therapy services.

'It is encouraging that the report identifies pockets of positive and progressive activity in Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations. In some areas, counselling services specialising in working with clients from racialised communities are commissioned to deliver NHS Talking Therapies, but many more are receiving referrals from NHS sources but without funding.

'This is why we'll continue to pressure the UK Government to invest in local community-based counselling services, including high quality, accessible and culturally sensitive services to people from marginalised community backgrounds and those at greatest risk of psychological distress and mental ill health.'



SCoPEd transition updates

If you are unsure how the accreditation scheme has changed in light of the SCoPEd transition period, you'll find it all explained online.

Check out the 'SCoPEd Transition Period: what does it mean for members?' online event which is available on the on-demand page of our website. You'll find presentations and a Q&A session. You can also download a CPD certificate.

i See: www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/bacp-events/on-demand-services

Join in discussions about spirituality

Don't forget that if you are looking to strike up conversations with like-minded colleagues about spirituality or faith-related matters, the BACP Communities of Practice platform is a great space to do it.

You can start your own conversation or join in an existing debate.

i See: www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/bacp-events/communities-of-practice

BACP divisional journals

BACP publishes specialist journals within six other sectors of counselling and psychotherapy practice.

Healthcare Counselling and Psychotherapy Journal

This quarterly journal from BACP Healthcare is relevant to counsellors and psychotherapists working within healthcare settings.



Coaching Today

The BACP Coaching journal is suitable for coaches from a range of backgrounds including counselling and psychotherapy, management or human resources.



BACP Children, Young People & Families

The journal of BACP Children, Young People & Families is a useful resource for therapists and other professionals interested in the mental health of young people.



Private Practice

This journal is dedicated to counsellors and psychotherapists working independently, in private practice, or for EAPs or agencies, in paid or voluntary positions.



University & College Counselling

This is the journal of BACP Universities & Colleges, and is ideal for all therapists working within higher and further education settings.



BACP Workplace

This journal is provided by BACP Workplace and is read widely by those concerned with the emotional and psychological health of people in organisations.



These journals are available as part of membership of BACP's divisions or by subscription.

To enquire about joining a BACP division, call 01455 883300. For a free of charge consultation on advertising within these journals, contact Sonal Mistry on 0203 771 7200, or email sonal.mistry@thinkpublishing.co.uk

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