

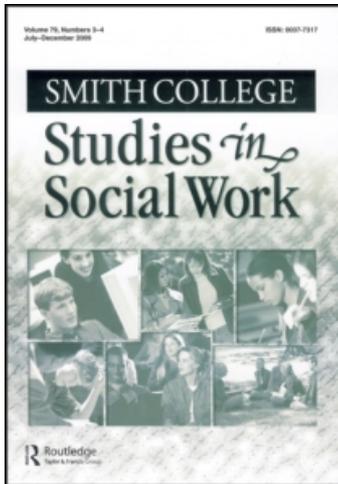
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CLINICAL ILLUSTRATIONS AND PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

Meditative Dialogue: Cultivating Sacred Space in Psychotherapy – An Intersubjective Fourth?

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Meditative dialogue offers a simple way to cultivate sacred space in psychotherapy and in one's life. Through mindfulness and meditation practices, client and therapist together develop the capacity to enliven their embodied experience of living truths and to deeply invite life into their lives. This article offers a review of theoretical and conceptual literature on spirituality, intersubjectivity, relational practice, and meditation and mindfulness practices as applied to psychotherapy. It offers a discussion of meditative dialogue as a method through which sacred space can be accessed as therapist and client engage collaboratively in the quest for transformation through psychotherapy.

KEYWORDS *dialogue, embodiment, intersubjective third, meditation, mindfulness, numinous, relational psychotherapy, sacred space, silence, spirituality, transformation*

Truth makes little sense and has no real impact if it is merely a collection of abstract ideas. Truth that is living experience, on the other hand, is challenging, threatening, and transforming. The first kind of truth consists of information collected and added, from a safe distance, to our mental inventory. The second kind involves risking our familiar and coherent interpretation of the world—it is an act of surrender, of complete and embodied cognition that is seeing, feeling, intuiting, and comprehending

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all at once. Living truth leads us ever more deeply into the unknown territory of what our life is. (Ray, 2000, p. 1)

What is it about the phenomenon of being in relationship with another human being that can transform a moment and those present and participating in that moment? How then does this interaction become an enlivening and creative process in which each participant is changed in some profound and fundamental way? How can meditation and mindfulness practices be used to harness these energies to cultivate the sacred in psychotherapy as a resource to dip into and draw upon at any moment?

Over the years, I have increasingly come to trust, cultivate and honor what I think of as co-created “sacred space” in the therapeutic interaction. I have developed a practice of focusing on the “space in between” in my work with clients, that space in the relationship between therapist and client through which “mutual influence and change is possible” (Flaskas, Mason & Perlesz, 2005, p. xxi). It is a place that I experience as not me, not my client(s), and not the jointly created field of the intersubjective third (Benjamin, 2002, 2004, 2006; Ogden, 1994, 1996; Stolorow & Atwood, 1992), but rather a fourth space, a disciplined and carefully tended crucible that we develop together as a source of spiritual energy and healing. It is a space in which processes occur that are difficult to put into words, a place of embodiment below/beyond the mind, in which deep and fundamental exchanges of energy occur beyond the verbal dialogue, perhaps beyond consciousness. This cocreated space has the capacity to attract the numinous (Jung, 1973), and has the potential to generate wisdom. It is a protectively nurtured safe and vibrating space of living experience into which pains and joys can be rendered, in which alchemy can occur (Rowan, 2001), and through which transformation and an awareness of infinite possibilities can emerge. It is a space of wonder.

Psychotherapy is, I believe, a form of seeking. It is a pursuit of authenticity, truth, meaning, purpose, peace, equanimity, and the development of internal structures that offer one the capacity to flexibly handle the inevitable pains and challenges that a fully inhabited and vibrant life requires that one negotiate in an ongoing way. Although most clients enter the therapeutic interaction for a particular reason, a feeling of stuckness in their lives, a crisis point, or relationship difficulties, I would argue that psychotherapy is, ultimately, a spiritual pursuit. It is a pursuit of enlivenment, attunement, alignment, and resonance with the energies of an integrated and fully embodied life.

The cultivation of sacred space in psychotherapy yields a wealth of energy that can become a source of wisdom and containment. It can be dipped into at any moment and, through intersubjective interaction, can become internalized and carried forward as a resource as client and therapist discover, through joint action (Shotter, 1993), ways always to “go on” in their lives (Wittgenstein, 1953).

This sacred space pulsates with a life force and with the creative energies of what I would identify as love. Musicians, artists, dancers, actors, writers, all human beings at creative moments in our lives seek attunement with this vibration. In our most expanded moments we speak of “getting out of the way,” “taking a breath,” “being in the moment,” and embracing silence so that these energies can come through us and we can work toward giving them expression. The goal, I believe, is to find that place inside and outside of ourselves that holds its own reservoir of that life force, and to then surrender and “get out of the way” so that its energies can move through us, guide us, hold us and heal us in profound ways that may be beyond our capacities to grasp or articulate. It is a resource that is there always, and our lives can be said to be about opening ourselves to it, developing our selves as vessels to contain it, and becoming all that we are meant to be. In my work with clients we cultivate this resource through a process that I call meditative dialogue.

Meditative dialogue is a transformative form of interaction that “combines meditative practices of sitting and listening to the space between the breaths with postmodern collaborative practices of ‘not-knowing’” (Lord, 2007, p. 334). It is a process that begins with silence and with the development of a capacity to listen deeply to the wisdom of inner knowledges and to those that arise from the carefully nurtured sacred space in between in psychotherapy. It is a process that invites life into one’s interactions and embodied lived experiences.

In this article I focus on the meditative dialogue process as a method for cultivating sacred space that can be used as a resource, an ultimate container, and an entity that can be accessed as therapist and client engage collaboratively in the quest for transformation through psychotherapy.

BACKGROUND

Over the past 20 years or so, psychodynamic psychotherapy has become more interactive, collaborative, intersubjective, and relational (Benjamin, 2002, 2004, 2006; Mitchell, 2003; Ogden, 1994, 1996; Surrey, 2005; Wachtel, 2008). Psychodynamic theorists have, as well, become more interactive, collaborative, intersubjective, and relational, as they have borrowed from other theoretical threads and disciplines, incorporating increasingly complex and nonlinear levels of understanding and integration (Flaskas, 2005; Sander, 2002; Wachtel, 2008). They have moved from one-person to two-person models, from drive theory to relational theory, and from linear to circular thinking as they have integrated object relations, self-psychology, developmental, attachment, biological, neuropsychological, and systems theories, to name but a few. The use of dialogical, social constructionist, and narrative constructs has added to the fund of theories and practices of psychotherapy, as they have evolved from monological to dialogical and collaborative

processes of interaction that incorporate a multiplicity of diverse voices, reveling in the chaos and possibility that complexity encourages (Andersen, 1991; Anderson, 1997, 2005, 2007; Blanton, 2007; Seikkula, Arnknill, & Erikson, 2003; Seikkula et al., 2006; Seikkula & Olsen, 2003; Seikkula & Trimble, 2005).

In addition to an emphasis on relational and intersubjective work, there has also been a recent movement toward the integration of spirituality and mindfulness in psychotherapy (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005; Griffith & Griffith, 2003; Hick & Bien, 2008; Kwee, Gergen, & Koshikawa, 2006; Linehan, 1993; Siegel, 2007, 2008; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006; Williams, Teasdale, Segal, & Zinn, 2007). This emphasis has moved the practice of psychotherapy to remarkable levels.

Spirituality and Psychotherapy

Much of the literature on spirituality and psychotherapy focuses on how to talk about spirituality in the therapeutic interaction (Griffith & Griffith, 2003; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006), mindfulness and its application to specific diagnostic categories (Linehan, 1993; Rubin, 1996; Simpson et al., 2007; Skogrand et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2007), or mindfulness and its application to specific kinds of therapy (Epstein, 1995, 2005; Germer et al., 2005; Gurney & Rogers, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Perez-De-Albeniz & Holmes, 2000; Rubin, 1996; Siegel, 2007, 2008; Styron, 2005; Surrey, 2005). I am interested in focusing on using mindfulness and meditation practices in psychotherapy to cultivate and intensify the spiritual energy that develops in the sacred space in between therapist and client.

In their book *Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy*, Griffith and Griffith (2003) speak of their “therapeutic conversations” with clients as “sacred encounters” (p. ix). They define spiritual stories as those that speak of connection and “transcend time and space” (p. ix), and their book delineates the many ways in which they open up conversations in their therapeutic practices to “culturally appropriate dialogues” about spirituality in peoples’ lives.

Jung spoke more directly of approaching the numinous (defined as the sacred or transcendent, “filled with a sense of the presence of divinity” [Webster’s]), as a primary goal in his work with clients. “The main interest of my work is not concerned with the treatment of neurosis but rather with the approach to the numinous. But the fact is that the approach to the numinous is the real therapy and inasmuch as you attain to the numinous experiences you are released from the curse of pathology” (Jung, 1973, p. 377).

Bion (1970) also emphasized a direct approach to the numinous, talking about the importance of “the ability to tolerate not knowing, the capacity to sit it out with a patient, often for long periods, without any real precision as to where we are” (p. 187). He spoke of this as a capacity for “faith that there is an ultimate reality and truth—the unknown unknowable, ‘formless

infinite’”(p. 30). Cooper (2001) and Bucca (2007) expanded on Bion’s concept of ultimate reality and truth, focusing on his interest in the similarities between Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis, and the importance of “at-onement” over knowing. Meditation can become a route to an ultimate reality and truth, the development of a way to experience a form of containment (Bion, 1967), or a holding environment that is always there to be accessed in its fluid form and formlessness.

Meditation and Mindfulness in Psychotherapy

Meditation and mindfulness practices, as used in psychotherapy, aim to help therapists and clients become fully present and listen attentively in deeply silent open and compassionate ways to themselves, to others, and to the wisdom that exists in the universe and is cultivated in the space in between. These practices have become integrated into Western psychology and psychotherapy such that we have reached an exciting point at which there is a potential for “one of the defining processes and opportunities of our time—namely, the global cross-fertilization and mutual enrichment of two cultures” and developed an opportunity to “explore the implications for understanding human nature and potentials” (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006, p. 228). Walsh and Shapiro (2006) emphasized an extent to which they feel that we have underestimated what is possible in the development of human capacities.

Meditation and mindfulness practices are, it seems, routes to the exploration and development of these human potentials. They help people to learn how to live, offering tools for people to learn how to tune in to their bodies, to their internal worlds, to spirituality, and to their particular life questions. All human beings grapple with questions about their life’s meaning and purpose; how then shall I live given all that I have been born with and all that has happened in my life?

Jon Kabat-Zinn is a major contributor to the development of mindfulness, which he defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (1994, p. 4). He described meditation as the route to mindfulness, “Meditation helps us wake up from this sleep of automaticity and unconsciousness, thereby making it possible for us to live our lives with access to the full spectrum of our conscious and unconscious possibilities” (p. 3). Interestingly, he distinguished mindfulness from spiritual practice, saying that mindfulness has a vitality that he contrasts with the narrowness that is, in his estimation, associated with spirituality: “Mindfulness allows everything to shine with the luminosity that the word ‘spiritual’ is meant to connote” (p. 265). Meditation and mindfulness practices offer opportunities for the development of inner resources, equanimity or equipoise, and ways to dip into the flow of the life force that can enhance, enliven and animate one’s life and relationships.

Styron (2005), in his discussion of meditation as a path to awakening in psychotherapy, divides the application of mindfulness to the therapeutic interaction into three periods. He identifies an early period in which the focus is on how to overcome individual suffering. In the middle period, he says, an awareness develops that everything is in constant flux and therefore there is “no-self,” no “ultimate reference point,” which is accompanied by a sense of freedom and the “spontaneous arising of compassion” (p. 263). This is followed by a third period in which, what he termed “Buddhanature” evolves, the idea that “each of us is fundamentally and unconditionally pure and whole” (p. 264).

Siegel (2008) characterized mindfulness as “awareness of awareness” and spoke of it as a process of developing an “attuned relationship with oneself” (p. 1), or a “form of internal attunement” (p. 7). He encourages his clients to approach their here-and-now experience with “curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love (COAL)” (p. 8). This is an acronym that I use in my work with clients as we sit together and focus on being present, compassionate, curious, open, accepting, and loving.

Co-meditation

Surrey (2005) described a relational therapy that seems similar to meditative dialogue, in which both therapist and client engage in “co-meditation”:

While the therapist’s focus remains on the experience of the patient, *both* patient and therapist are engaging in a collaborative process of mutual attentiveness and mindfulness in and through relational joining. . . . This view of therapy as *co-meditation* offers new possibilities for the therapeutic enterprise. . . . Because both therapist and patient are called on to be present to the best of their abilities (to themselves, to the other, and to the movement of the relationship into and out of connection), the therapy process is deepened and enlarged. It begins to show a quality of growth consistent with the broader goals of mindfulness. . . . These moments of deep connection go beyond the nature of relationship as customarily described in object relations, relational, or intersubjective psychology literature. (pp. 94–95)

Thus therapist and client are able to cultivate a spiritual connectedness to themselves, to one another, and to the universe that is energizing and transformative in the psychotherapeutic interaction.

Transformative Energy

These moments of deep connection unleash a transformative energy that can be described as fluid and healing. Energy can be said to exist on a continuum between fluidity and mass, density and flow, intractability, and softness. When clients venture into therapeutic relationships they often identify a

“stuck place” in their lives, a contracted, even concretized place that their best efforts have not been able to successfully change. Through the therapeutic interaction, they are able to breathe life and air into this place, so that there is more flexibility, openness, more possibility and, as Anderson (1997) said, “problems dissolve,” fall away, are transformed. It is, I would argue, in the interactional sphere between self and other, other and self, self and self, and self and the sacred space that is cultivated in between that energies are heated up and change can occur. These constructs are discussed in the psychoanalytic literature as occurring in the intersubjective sphere.

The Intersubjective Third

Benjamin, in her writings on the “intersubjective third” (2002, 2004, 2006), talked about the concept of the analytic third as different from Ogden’s (1994, 1996) “subjugating third.” Ogden spoke of the intersubjective third as existing in the realm of, and an expansion of, transference/countertransference phenomena. Rather than Ogden’s “cocreated subject-object” third (2004, p. 9), Benjamin identified a “more advanced form of thirdness” (2004, p. 11) that is shared by therapist and client and experienced as a “cooperative endeavor” created by “both and neither” (p. 18). She described this interaction, as experienced by her client Aliza, as “deeply holding and musically attuning” (p. 36). The origins of the third are said to be “in the nascent or primordial experience that has been called oneness, union, resonance. We might think of this latter concept as the *energetic third*” (2004, p. 18). This thirdness is characterized as “that to which we surrender” (p. 8), a space that “opens up through surrender, the acceptance of *being*” (p. 26, emphasis added). She went on to say that “by making a claim on the potential space of thirdness, we call upon it, and so call it into being” (p. 33). Similarly, through meditative dialogue, we make a claim on sacred space and so call it into being. The mindfulness and meditation practices that we utilize intensify this space and the energy heats up.

Benjamin’s “energetic third” is similar to but different from this sacred space, which is an entity that I characterize as an *intersubjective fourth*. It is a powerful source that is accessed through the means of the therapeutic relationship as therapist and client jointly cultivate a space through which they can access the numinous, or the divine. The meaning and experience that emerges in meditative dialogue can be said to be a product of subject and object, object and subject, subject and subject (Benjamin, 2004), and, I would add, the transformative energy and wisdom that can be accessed through the co-constructed sacred space in between.

An Intersubjective Fourth?

Although those who write about the processes of change in psychotherapy allude to “the mystery,” no one has, to my knowledge, focused on the

energy cultivated in the pursuit of spirituality in meditation, in moments of intimacy in therapeutic interaction, as what I would name an intersubjective fourth, a sacred space in between that can be a source of love and healing in psychotherapy. Sander (2002) spoke of this “mystery” as a route to becoming known as one’s “true self” (p. 17).

This intersubjective fourth is a co-created separate-yet-connected sacred space that offers a resource that is always there to be accessed at any moment in the pursuit of wholeness, authenticity, and coherence. It is a space that is similar to Winnicott’s (1971) transitional and potential space, to his holding environment, and to Bion’s (1967) concept of containment. The difference is that it is a spiritual larger-than-life energetic space with which to interact, through which to transition, that can be internalized and carried forward into one’s life. Although it is difficult to put into words, it is a palpable, vibrating, energizing, life-enhancing, and compassionate space in which the world seems to open up, our lives seem to make sense, there is order in the universe, and all seems to be manageable as what seemed insurmountable becomes possible.

Winnicott’s Transitional and Potential Space

In his book *Playing and Reality* (1971), Winnicott spoke of transitional space or potential space as important to the process of creativity and to the development of a life worth living, “We find either that individuals live creatively and feel that life is worth living or else that they cannot live creatively and are doubtful about the value of living” (p. 83). He talked about transitional space as an intermediate realm of experience in which inner and outer realities are separate-yet-related. Potential space is that intermediate area of experience where creativity is said to occur. “The potential space between baby and mother, between child and family, between individual and society or the world, depends on experience which leads to trust. It can be looked upon as *sacred* to the individual in that *it is here that the individual experiences creative living*” (Winnicott, p. 121). It is, he says, important in this process to inhabit space and just “be,” “After being – doing and being done to. But first, being” (p. 99).

It is not only: what are we doing? The question also needs to be posed: where are we (if anywhere at all)? We have used the concepts of inner and outer, and we want a third concept. Where are we when we are doing what in fact we do a great deal of our time, namely, enjoying ourselves? Does the concept of sublimation really cover the whole pattern? Can we gain some advantage from an examination of this matter of the possible existence of a place for living that is not properly described by either of the terms “inner” and “outer”? (Winnicott, 1971, p. 114)

It is this “third concept” that I would call the intersubjective fourth. It is a place of “first, being”: a place of knowing who we are and what our lives are about. It is a sacred space in between that can become internalized and carried forward into our lives. It is in this sacred space that we sit with one another and call upon the universe for help as we contemplate the development of a fully embodied and enlivened life. Ironically, much of what occurs in this space, cultivated through meditative dialogue, occurs in a dialogue of silent communion.

Silence

A number of people have worked to describe this sacred space of silent communion: “This space is filled with silence. A silence that reverberates, that pulsates with rhythms and wisdoms that can “release us into a more expansively felt, more ecstatic space of openness-to-being. . . . well-grounded in the aliveness of our deepening repose” (Levin, 1985, p. 349).

Embracing silence creates room for the “not-yet-said” (Neimeyer, 2001, p. 369) and allows for a deepening contemplation and reflection (Andersen, 1991). “In this open, spacious place of the present, there are simply thoughts without judgment, without a thinker [Epstein, 1995], which create a shift for the therapist and change the nature of the interaction, allowing for more receptivity and openness” (La Torre, 2002, p. 34).

Reik (1951) described the process of “listening with the third ear” as one of using a free-floating attention where communication occurs through the silence. “It is not just silence. It vibrates with unspoken words. We know that it is the indispensable condition for the reception and absorption of the communications given to the analyst—and more” (p. 125).

In her work with adolescents recovering from trauma, Pearmain (2005) talked of the lack of a safe haven in their everyday lives. She says that in her work with these young people, “the impact of silence and shared silence was very significant. . . . Participants attributed a sense of support and nourishment from the opportunity for sharing silence and time for reflection and integration which could facilitate ‘the most profound thoughts I’ve ever had’, and transformational experiences . . . we do this heart connection” (p. 286).

Each person’s life can be said to be about developing the capacity for “at-one-ment” with one’s own purpose and with the wisdom and energies or vibrations of universe. In my work with clients I think of the embracing of silence as a collaborative way of positioning ourselves, a way of developing a vessel that must be strong enough, flexible enough and deep enough to contain what it must. This is a vessel that they (and I) will carry forward into other interactions and relationships.

Embodiment of Love

Only a few have, to my knowledge, dared to call this particular shared process “love” (Bridges, 2005; Pizer, 2004; Seikkula & Trimble, 2005; Siegel, 2007). Bridges (2005) spoke of the difficulties therapists encounter in negotiating “therapeutic love” or “analytic love,” which she characterizes as “a deep abiding care and concern for another’s growth and development” (p. 75). She humorously speaks of this love as the “L-word.” This is a love that is different from the erotic love that others have written about (see, e.g., Davies, 1994; Schamess, 1999). It is a love that comes of a mutual collaboration of shared humanness and vulnerability as we cultivate sacred space and work together, developing an intimacy and connectedness through facing life’s challenges over a period of perhaps years.

Seikkula and Trimble (2005) talked about an “embodiment of love” through dialogical interaction, which they say marks “moments of healing” (p. 473) in their Open Dialogue approach. “The feelings of love that emerge in us during a network meeting are neither romantic nor erotic. They are our own embodied responses to participation in a shared world of meaning co-created with people who trust each other and ourselves to be transparent, comprehensive beings with each other” (p. 473).

Pizer (2004) described a therapy in which a client returned 13 years after what Pizer had understood to be a limited therapy that he had “survived,” to thank him for standing by her. “You stood by me. I felt loved and sheltered. You made it possible for me to stay alive long enough, until I was ready to face the work I had to do. You gave me the hope that I held onto even when things got worse, until I could find it in myself to make them better” (p. 294).

In my work with clients, it is this shared feeling of therapeutic love that we collaboratively cultivate as we focus on the sacred space in between to touch the numinous, access divine wisdom, and promote healing and change.

MEDITATIVE DIALOGUE

In addition to client and therapist each engaging in a dialogue with their inner worlds and in a carefully constructed collaborative dialogue with one another, I believe that it is important that each engage in a dialogue with the co-constructed sacred space in between in the psychotherapy office. Meditative dialogue offers a method for grounding and tuning in to one’s mind, emotions, body, spirit, and to the space in between through breath work, physical scanning, and silent communion.

I have written elsewhere about the use of meditative dialogue as a tool I use to engage with students in collaborative learning processes (Lord, 2007).

I use an adapted form of the meditative dialogue guidelines with some of my clients to cultivate a deepening of the therapeutic relationship, and to co-create a sense of safety and sacred space in the therapy office:

1. The focus of client and therapist remains on the experience of the client.
2. Client and therapist each focus on their breath and body sensations, and on the space in the middle of the room. Each positions himself/herself symbolically, calling upon the space for help and for wisdom as we engage in this work together.
3. We reflect, contemplate, pause.
4. Listen deeply.
5. Allow speech to arise from the silence.
6. Experience the space.
7. Notice assumptions.
8. Notice reactions and judgments.
9. Give the process full attention.
10. Say only what really wants/needs to be said.

The shared communion and the shared fanning of the flames of meditation heighten the energy and sense of possibility in the room as we work together on the material that arises from the space in between.

CLINICAL ILLUSTRATION

In my work with clients I take time before the beginning of every session to sit and meditate for a short while, breathing deeply, connecting with myself and tuning in to energies and vibrations, in order to be present, open, aligned, attuned and curious. There is thus a way that I position myself in the room, a certain reverence that I hold for the process that we embark on together and for the wisdom that arises from the space in between. We begin always with a silence that is broken only by the client.

Tessa

Tessa, a meditator for the past 10 years, uses her meditation beliefs and practices to deepen her process moment-to-moment as she works with me to develop her capacities for intimacy and authenticity. She is 45, an incest survivor who, though she has been extremely successful in her life and work, has had difficulty in her intimate relationship with her husband of 23 years. They have no children and have, in fact, reportedly had no sexual contact in 21 years. Although this is an issue for her, this is not the central

focus of her work with me. Her focus is on the incest and on the hypervigilance and anxiety she experiences in her life in ways that can be debilitating at times. We work on the difficulty she has in knowing who she is and what she feels as she defends herself against anticipated and perceived dangers.

Tessa comes into the room, removes her shoes, and sits cross-legged on the couch across from me. We begin in silence. Although our eyes remain open as she experiences closing them as “too dangerous,” each of us looks to the space in between as we attend to our breathing, tuning in and aligning with the present moment and with the wisdom that arises from the sacred space that we cultivate in the middle of the room. In these silences I experience a heightening and sharpening of my awarenesses and a softening and opening of my physical and internal being. I feel a sense of warmth and mutuality, “at-one-ment,” an increased energy and capacity to tune in and speak the same language as we enter our dialogue from a more attuned place, surrendering to the wisdom of the space in between. Often thoughts arise from this space that are surprising, and a wisdom becomes accessible that I have come to value, honor, and trust.

Tessa: I'm always worried that I am not going to be able to connect. (silence)
 . . . I am sitting, and feeling okay . . . coming into the space. I don't feel here in a conscious or embodied way. I feel like I am driving myself to be here – enacting the abuser and not paying attention to how I feel. . . . It's about learning how to be present and how to sit with someone in a room together . . . I feel anxious.

T: Anxious?

Tessa: Like I want to hide. It's too much. It's about trust . . .

T: (Nod).

Tessa: I don't know why that makes me cry. . . . I am just enjoying the silence. I'm feeling good, but I can't look at you. I feel like I want to hide.

T: How about if we just sit and breathe together? Slow down and tune in?
 (We sit quietly for a few minutes)

Tessa: It's so peaceful here. I can feel myself relaxing for the first time this week.

T: And what are you aware of?

Tessa: The sound of the birds. I love that sound.

T: And? Let's go deeper.

We sit in silence together and out of the silence it seems that the world opens up. Tessa repositions herself and looks at me, drawing herself up out of her usual slouch. There is a strong and genuine feeling of connectedness, an intimacy in her gaze:

Tessa: Ok. I think I know what I need to talk about. I need to talk about my father and how he stole my life from me. I feel damaged. And yet, when I sit here like this, I don't. I feel like this is just a life. It is my life, and I can choose to live it differently. I can choose happiness. . . . I am perfect. I deserve it.

In my work with Tessa, we move in and out of each of Styron's (2005) phases of mindfulness in no particular order. There are sessions in which we need to focus on her pain, on issues going on in her external world, in her work, and in her relationships. In these sessions we use the meditative dialogue guidelines as tools to slow things down and help in situating ourselves to remember who she is and what is important in her life. There are also sessions in which we focus on the fluidity and constant flux of things in her life, and the importance of flexibly responding to them. These sessions consist of many periods of mutual silence, with each of us focusing inward, attuning to the co-constructed rhythms of our breath, and to the sacred space that we have co-created and nurtured over time. At times I consciously use my breath and the tone and rhythms of my speech to meet with hers or to slow things down so that the space can open up for the not-yet-said and the not-yet-thought. Although we do touch moments in which we become aware of a sense of alignment, it is difficult for Tessa to feel whole, and attuned to what Styron describes as her "Buddhanature." The moments when this does happen are precious and enlivening in ways that, though frightening to her, are becoming more possible to handle. She is drawn to them and increasingly seeks them out.

Recently Tessa returned from a family vacation, a cruise that included her husband, her siblings and their families, and her mother (her father, the perpetrator of the incest, died a few years ago). She described the trip as difficult, as her mother was "critical, anxious, and judgmental" of her. The week after her return, she was dismayed to discover that she had felt "energized and back to herself" following a session with me. She worried that she had become "too dependent" on me and could not sustain her enlivenment and "sense of her own power" without me. We talked about her response to our session as, perhaps, a response to a process that occurs on a different plane. In our interactions we cultivate enlivenment, energy, calling upon the numinous, the space in between, and thus calling it into being. Thus she felt "at home" again after our session. She was reminded of that sacred space, and of her capacity to dip into her inner resources and heal herself there at any moment.

Tessa says that she is a "doer," working to control environments in which she has been "done to" and disempowered in her past. She is aware of a growing capacity to tolerate the aliveness and sense of wholeness that comes from our meditative dialogue practices:

Tessa: I love that feeling of going inside, into the silence. What is hard is that the aliveness I feel in my body is so huge that I become anxious, afraid I can't handle it. It feels like if I don't keep performing I am dead. I need to keep everyone distracted and entertained so that they don't do anything bad to me.

- T: And yet you are able, more and more to just be, and to handle that aliveness.
- Tessa: My nervous system is still a mess, but my experience of it is different since I began meditating.

Tessa is particularly focused and disciplined in her work with me. Her years of meditation have served her well, enabling a process with me that is deeply connected and energized, tuning in to the sacred space that brings us to living truths. As we sit together at the beginning of each session we are able to connect with the numinous and somehow this creates a space in our relationship that vibrates with a feeling of being able to handle whatever comes. Through our meditative dialogue process over time we have developed a deep trust and love that allows for safe and healing interactions that encourage her to face challenges and increase her capacities to bring more life to her life.

CONCLUSIONS

Meditative dialogue offers a simple way to cultivate sacred space in psychotherapy and in one's life. Through the process of developing an ultimate containment, an intersubjective fourth that can be dipped into at any moment, client and therapist can together develop the capacity to enliven their embodied experience of their living truths so as to more deeply invite life into their lives. The simple discipline of sitting together in the therapy office and attending to the space between the breaths opens up the universe and brings energy to possibilities. It brings us to the magic of our lives and to an alignment with our life's truths. It offers an embodied experience of "living truth that leads us ever more deeply into the unknown territory of what our life is" (Ray, 2000, p. 1).

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