

6 PRACTICE



"To be contemplative is to feel the quiet joy of reverie and reflection, to experience the union of imagination and memory in a tranquil mind. Contemplation is less mystical than restful, less a form of meditation than a form of relaxation. By concentrating on a focal point or object, the viewer becomes one with it. After concentrating long enough, the focal point loses its literalness and becomes abstract—we transcend the object, and by extension, the world. After a contemplative experience, we come away refreshed, more centred, more tranquil, and more joyful, ready to face the outside world with new equanimity and self-awareness."

Julia Moir Messervy, **Contemplative Gardens**

"It is possible to just sit in a particular place and absorb what nature has to teach.

Montaigne, quoted in **The Ultimate Heresy**

Sitting

Alicia Tyndall:

I get comfortable.

I close my eyes and breathe deeply. I am already breathing deeply from the hike up. So I let my breathing slow down. I let my neck and shoulder muscles relax. I feel my heart slow down. It takes time.

I turn my mind off, as best I can. After all these years, it is not easy to stop classifying, categorizing. To empty my mind of all that I have learned about plants and flowers.

I open my eyes and I am simply there. I let my senses open to everything around me.

To colours. The grey brown rocks. The different greens of trees and bushes, plants and grasses in the rocks. The white snow, grey-blue in the shadows. The sky. The clouds.

To light and shadow. On the rocks, on the ridges. On the snow. The reflections in the play of light and shadow on the peaks and ridges. On snow. Reflections in the tiny pool of water that forms on the shelf after rain.

I am aware of the textures of the Sanctuary. The granular surface of a rock, the striated bark of a tree, the patterns of needles on the pines and firs. The rock formations on the ridges and peaks. The glittering surface of snow in sunlight. The wooliness of clouds. The smoothness of the sky.

I feel the wind on my face. In the Sanctuary, I am not struggling against it, as happens sometimes when you are hiking or skiing. If it brings rain or snow, it does not matter. After rain, I smell the aroma of pines, of the damp earth and plants and flowers. Almost the wind itself. I can almost taste the rain.

When I reach stillness and silence, I make space for my spirit to expand and grow. In the natural setting, silence is never just that. It is full of sounds that we do not hear in our busy, urban lives. When I let myself listen, I hear the buzz of insects, sometimes a small animal in bushes. I hear the cries of a bird. And occasionally, heavy rain on the rock and the roof of the pavilion.

It is not always as orderly as that sounds. I do not look for a particular experience. The experience is different each time. I let myself open to whatever comes along. Breathe it all in. Soak it all in. Let the variety, the beauty, the light fill my body with peaceful joy or energy. I let the life spirit rise within me with every breath. The spirit in every living organism. I do not think about what it is. I do not pretend to understand it. The important thing is not to

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analyze. Not to question. Just accept. I simply feel it within me and within every plant and creature. I feel that connection to everything around me.

Takao Matsushima:

I have to be patient. Let myself relax.

I start at the top of my head, move down from the face and neck to shoulders, chest, waist, and down the legs to my toes.

It's not always easy. I focus on my breathing, and that brings me back to the present. The key is to relax, feel the weight of my body on the platform, hold myself, my back and spine in a relaxed but upright position.

I like it when there's a breeze, even a slight movement of air. There usually is, up on the ridge. Whatever I'm thinking about, I let the breeze carry it away.

Many people say they feel a great deal of stress in today's world. Having a sanctuary where they can be quiet and peaceful can be very useful for them. It's not always easy to find peace and quiet when you're at home. There's always something to be done.

There's a paradox here. Western society is the society of the individual. I'm number one. Me first! Get what you can! Take what you can! At the same time, Western society doesn't encourage people to be alone. Just the opposite! It pushes you to be like everyone else; do what everyone else does; wear what everyone else wears; go where everyone else goes. As for leisure and a change from the stress of work and life? Go to a fitness club. Do a triathlon, Get a home entertainment centre.

What about doing nothing? I think that's a very important aspect of the Sanctuary. It's a beautiful place where you go to do nothing. You have to get there. Drive. And walk. And sit. Do nothing. It's hard to do nothing. It's hard to sit still. It's hard not to think. You can't force yourself to stop thinking. Your mind goes crazy. It won't keep still. You just have to let it slow down by itself.

And then, if you can sit long enough, it happens. You find peace. For a few minutes at least. We don't have enough peace in our lives. Except perhaps when we sleep. But this is different. Once you've experienced it, and when you've sat a few times, you can take that peace with you wherever you go. Now, when I want to relax, I try to just *be* in the city. And as I travel around, I look for nature, and find it in all sorts of surprising places. That's how I take my experience back to the city.

Somehow, my grandfather and my dad could do something like that in their lives. My dad used to say even when he was doing something, he was doing nothing. It kept him happy. He learned it from his dad, and that kept them positive, despite the bad things that happened in their lives.

Julia Perry:

I volunteer in the local office of the Natural History Federation. We deal with different conservation issues. Wildlife habitat protection. Hydro developments. Pollution from mining operations. Wetlands. We were part of the Protect Our Park Coalition that opposed the Samilkawen resort proposal.

I thought it was a good idea, although some people in the Coalition didn't like it a bit. They thought it would have had a bigger impact if the Coalition had done it, not a very small group of people who'd gone off on their own and done something to get attention. It's hard to say how much it helped stop the Samilkawen resort. It certainly got a lot of attention. I didn't want to criticize it too much, and when it was allowed to stay there, and when they built the new trail, I asked a friend at the Federation to come with me and see what it was like.

We stopped at the MindBody Space first, because she was taking yoga lessons. I thought she might like to do some yoga there, but when she saw a couple of women there who were very good, she said she was still just a beginner and she'd probably do it all wrong and that would be embarrassing. They were very friendly and said you didn't have to be an expert or anything. You just do whatever you could. But she hadn't brought her mat or clothes, and said maybe next time. She really liked the building, though. It was bigger than the studio where she was taking lessons, and she loved the big windows and the forest outside. They had the windows open.

When we got to the Sanctuary, we had to wait because there was someone sitting there. We didn't have to wait long. We didn't know much about meditating, but we knew the idea was to be quiet and still, so we just sat there side by side looking out at the mountains.

The views are nothing special. Not like the high mountains above Bryson Lake, say. But that's not the idea. I knew that. It wasn't a viewpoint. It was just a place in the mountains. So I tried to accept that. It was hard at first. I couldn't help thinking about all issues we'd been dealing with, and how much work we'd done, and still had to do. I thought of the protests against the Samilkawen expansion, and I realized that was one time we'd won. This Sanctuary was one of the things that came from our victory and I thought that was OK.

My mind was still full of issues, questions, politics, relationships, everything. They just bubbled up in my mind. But I sort of shifted them around, into the things I couldn't control. I just had to accept them as they were. The things I could do something about—I'd deal with them later. There didn't seem to be too many of them, then. I let them go. After a while, sitting quietly, I became less tense. I wasn't as angry and frustrated by all the problems in the world. It was easier to fill my mind with positive thoughts. How beautiful it was in the Sanctuary. How awesome nature is.

I thought how badly the natural environment has been treated, and how it regenerates and adapts to the changes made by human activities. I remembered the jungle in Cambodia, growing over the old cities, and in Mexico. I thought about wetlands, and all that they do for us, absorbing the toxic materials we dispose of, and providing shelter and food for fish and

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birds and animals. I tried to feel that natural power. It's what we need when we're fighting to protect nature, to help it regenerate. I wasn't expecting very much, so I was surprised. I felt better. I felt stronger. It made me realize again why it's worth fighting to protect the environment.

I don't know how long we sat there. I don't even remember how we decided it was time to go. I've made it sound as if I was thinking all those things. It just sort of happened that way. My friend Nita felt the same way. We thought it was a good experience, and we told our friends in the Federation they should try it. When we came back, I emailed the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Environment telling them they should set up Sanctuaries in other National Parks. I sent an email to the premier's office as well. Now, I'd like to go on a longer retreat, for a week at least. Somewhere by the sea. That's what I'd really like. In the meantime, I'm glad the Sanctuary's here. It's close and coming here for a morning or afternoon really helps take the pressure off.

Karen Stenson:

I don't know of any place like it. It's very calm and peaceful. It's like a church in that respect. My mom is very religious, and she always took us kids to church when we were young. My dad is different. He never wanted to go to church. I think I'm closer to him. I never felt as comfortable in a church as I do at the Sanctuary. I like being away from the city and amongst the trees and mountains. No one is telling me what to believe or how to think. Ever since Alicia told me about the Sanctuary idea, I've been thinking about religion and spirituality, and the environment. Not as seriously as Alicia and Ned. They know much more than I do, and have been environmentalists for much longer. I love to hear them talking about those things. Alicia showed me a way to meditate, you know, the way to sit and hold my hands, and how to count my breaths up to ten, things like that. But it hasn't been easy for me. I guess I'm still trying to develop some sort of spiritual discipline. Most of the time, I just sit there and look around at everything. And then I find I'm not really thinking at all. Time flies. Most of the time, I hate to leave.

Last summer, I went to the Sanctuary twice by myself. The first time, I had to deliver some plants to a nursery in Grenville, and instead of having a lunch break, I decided to go up to the Sanctuary. I knew Ned had gone there by himself, but he always thought most people, and especially women, would feel more comfortable if they weren't alone there. He didn't think it was particularly dangerous or anything; it would just be easier to meditate or relax if you weren't worried about anything. I think most people agreed with him, but I wanted to try it. I called Steve and told him what I was doing, so someone knew where I was.

I liked being there all alone. It was a windy day, but I felt really cozy sitting in the pavilion. I only had one side open, and I could watch the clouds moving across the tops of the mountains. Every now and then, the wind shook the sides of the pavilion. It sounds silly, but I started taking deep breaths and blowing out as if I was adding to the wind. I was blowing back at it. I was part of it! Some birds flew past, right in front of me, and I imagined what it would be like, being carried by the wind up and over the ridge! It was a wonderful feeling!

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I couldn't stay very long, and it wasn't a very "spiritual" time, but I really loved it. I ran down the trail like the wind! I suppose that was the dangerous part. I could have fallen and hurt myself. I was sorry to get into the trees where I could hardly feel the wind.

After that, I went back one more time when I was in Grenville. I wasn't as energetic that time. I sat very quietly and thought about all the other natural areas we were trying to protect and I wished every one of them had a Sanctuary where people could go. It would be an excellent way for more people to appreciate the value of those areas, and fight to save them. That's another reason why I'm glad I was able to be a small part of creating this Sanctuary.

Laurie Verdon:

I do a meditation I read about in a book. Earth, water, fire, and air.

I start by feeling heavy. Letting my body feel heavy on the platform. Being supported by the ground. By the rock and the ridge. Then feeling connected to the earth everywhere. Everywhere the earth is supporting, nourishing people. I feel nourished by the earth. By all the food it provides not only for people, but for animals too.

Then I think of water. Starting with the rain, falling in the mountains, running into rivers and lakes. Always finding a way down to the sea. Wearing away the rocks and the land as it goes to the oceans. And then it gets picked up again by the wind and carried in the clouds back to the mountains. The endless cycle. The water of life.

I feel the calmness of water. The softness. It's cool and soothing.

Next I think of fire. The fire of life! All those things about fire: energy, strength, passion, brightness, vitality. I feel it inside me, keeping me warm. I feel a sort of glow, like the embers of a fire, while I sit very still. But it's ready to blaze up when I need it. When I'm feeling strong and energetic.

And the energy of fire carries me up into the sky, into the air. The air is what the fire needs to burn. It's what we need to stay alive. I feel light and open to the air and the wind. I'm open to all possibilities, to everything in the world.

I feel these elements working together inside me. The earth gives fuel for the fire. The water controls the fire so it doesn't burn me up. And the fire needs the air to burn, and when the wind blows, the fire burns bright.

They work together in everyone, and that's how I feel connected to the world and to everyone and everything in it.

Alan Carmody:

I'm part of a Zen sangha in the city. A friend in the sangha had gone to the Sanctuary with Alicia Tyndall, and soon after the new trail was opened, we decided to go together.

We walked up very slowly, doing a walking meditation. When we got there, I sat facing the rock on one side of the platform. It's a bit like sitting in a zendo, the room in a Zen temple

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where the monks meditate facing a blank wall. It helps to empty your mind, having nothing to look at.

Of course, the rock isn't totally blank. I picked a spot and kept my eyes on it. Let it fade into nothingness. It was a hot day, and although I'd had a drink when we reached the pavilion, I got thirsty again. I felt very dry, like the rock. I let myself be like a rock. Solid. Heavy. Immovable.

It was a new experience for me. A little bug started to crawl up the rock, not exactly at the point I was focussed on, but where I could see it, no matter how hard I tried not to see it. But since I could see it, I let myself feel it crawl on me, on my skin, as if I was the rock. It was very light. It didn't tickle. I wasn't afraid of it biting me. I just let it crawl up and across the rock until I couldn't see it any more.

I'd never meditated quite like that before.

Ned Kinloch:

When I know—or expect—the weather to be clear, I like to be there at sunrise. It's still a bit dark lower down in the forest, but you're soon into the open forest just below the Sanctuary. The air's cool, even in summer, but the sky gets lighter, and the first sunlight hits the Tridents, creeps down to the Matheson ridge, and then I feel the warmth on my back as it reaches the Sanctuary. It's a great feeling. At times like that, it's impossible not to feel a sense of wonder. I feel at peace with myself and the world.

I don't go to the Sanctuary on a regular basis, but I've consciously tried to sit in different seasons, at different times of the year, and in different weather conditions. I skied in once, early in spring in glorious sunshine. That was mainly so I could do a longer ski up to Bryson Lake and back. I've also sat at night on top of the ridge above the pavilion a couple of times.

In that way—just being there, not thinking about anything in particular most of the time—I'm getting a sense of place, a fuller sense of the mountain environment. I thought I really knew the mountains when I was climbing and skiing, and in way, I did. The solidity of the rock, the climbing lines, the quality of the snow, the avalanche risks. Things like that. But in the last couple of years, I've learned about different aspects of the mountains. It's hard to put into words.

Time and space and change.

Every rockfall, every avalanche is part of that. You can't see it just by looking and waiting for something to happen. It just happens. You just sit there, not looking at anything in particular, and you hear the rumble of an avalanche. Or the sharp crack of a rock falling. You notice a puff of dust on a scree slope. Something moving. Something changing. We all know about things like erosion from school, but experiencing it like this is very different.

When the wind comes from the east, you might hear a truck on the Skyline Highway and remember there are towns and a city not far away. That's what set me thinking about a wider sense of place. The mountain ranges in front of me, the mountains beyond them, the

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mountains and valleys and rivers of Skyline Park. This particular part of the world. A watershed, a climate zone, a region among other regions. Separate, but all connected by the land or the wind and the weather.

In that way, the Sanctuary provides a starting point for an individual, and collective understanding of our place in the global environment and the multitude of connections that link us to the natural world. It underlines the importance of finding stability, even as we change in our own lives, getting centred, grounded—whatever term you want to use. Even though you can feel very small in the immensity of the mountains, the Sanctuary is a great place to think about yourself as a part of a larger world, and become aware of who you are, what you're capable of, and how best to use your abilities for the good of everyone.

Cathy Robinson:

I heard about the Sanctuary from a person in a yoga class I take. Three of us went together. We went up the trail, and I looked up and saw this big arch over the trail with bright red and green and purple ropes leading away on either side. We went through the arch and bit further on, I could see the little wooden shelter on the ridge, and then the view across to the mountains. It was so cute! There was nobody else there. It seemed like a little private hideaway.

We all sat in the shelter together, facing in different directions. When I meditate, I start by visualizing a peaceful, safe, beautiful natural place. I didn't have to visualize in the Sanctuary.

I keep my eyes closed. I listen to whatever sounds are around me. The Sanctuary is very quiet, but after a while you can hear all sorts of little sounds. I feel the platform underneath me, and the ground under that. I try to smell the air. That's hard. I know I shouldn't try. I should just let the smells come to me. When I open my eyes, everything seems new.

I am in a special place. I accept it as it is. I accept myself as I am. Not perfect. Nothing special. Just letting myself feel comfortable with who I am. Everything around me, the trees and the rocks and the mountains, all being what they are. I melt into everything around me. I'm in balance. I feel centred, and happy. I radiate my happiness around me, like a glowing lamp.

I let my happiness spread to everything around me. And then further and further away. I let a feeling of love and compassion spread out from me to all living creatures. May trees and plants and animals and all living things grow strong and well. May all the people in the world be at peace. May everyone share all the wonders of life that come from nature.

Heather Jorgensen:

I like the idea of sanctuary as a refuge from the world. It's like Thomas Merton's idea of "quiet, dark churches where people can take refuge." I've always remembered that. I like churches, but I find it hard to pray the way I used to when I was younger. Merton said it

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didn't matter if people prayed or not when they found refuge. The important thing was to be still and "breathe easily."

The Sanctuary works for me in the same way, except that it's light instead of dark. It's comforting to sit in the little shelter and all around is light. It's my refuge where I feel safe and at peace. I always find I can breathe more easily when I'm in the country, away from the city. I'm always aware of air pollution in the city. The air is thicker and heavier. Higher up in the mountains, I breathe slowly and deeply, and feel as if I'm breathing in all the goodness of clear mountain air. Of course, I know that air pollution is everywhere and it travels all around the world, so the air we breathe there is probably not much better than air anywhere else. But it feels like it is.

I know that's not what Thomas Merton meant by "breathing easily," but I feel that too. In place of God in church, or any god for that matter, I find peace and hope all around me. They're in all the growing, living things around me. When I'm in the Sanctuary, I feel the presence of a spiritual and lasting force in the world. I am filled with hope.

Rebecca Watson:

For a few weeks in summer, bugs can be a problem. If you're not prepared for them, without bug spray on your face and hands and neck, it's just about impossible to concentrate on anything. There's no water on the ridge, except right after rain, so bugs are not often a problem. But they're there. And you don't need a lot of them to be totally distracted. One or two will do it.

The worst day I've had was last summer, when I wasn't prepared. I should have known better. I tried to pull my shirt up around my neck, and pulled my hat down over my face. They weren't mosquitoes; they weren't biting. But they were buzzing around and landing on me, and I had to pull my arms into my shirt and cover up my hands. I put my pack over my legs—naturally I was wearing shorts that day!

I tried to focus on the bugs. They're part of the natural environment. They live up there—for how long I've no idea. I thought of all the mosquitoes and other insects I've had to deal with on climbing trips, bushwhacking up through trees and bushes, sitting around a smoky campfire trying to decide what's worse—the smoke or the bugs. Trying to get in and out of the tent without letting any in. Trying to catch the last one buzzing around waiting for you to fall asleep and then having a feast on you.

I imagined myself as a stoic Zen priest, absolutely immobile, absolutely focused, totally oblivious to insects. Or rather, I know they're there and totally accept them. I'm meditating, they're buzzing. Each of us doing their own thing.

But I'm not a Zen priest! It would take me ten lifetimes to reach that state of acceptance. In the end, I had to give up. I closed up the pavilion and went up on to the ridge and did some chi gong. There was just enough movement of air, and with the chi gong movements, slow as they are, I could concentrate on breathing and energy, on the flow of chi, and feel energized by being there.

Jean Lebrun:

In the snow, it is magical. It is so quiet. The big snowflakes drift down and wrap a soft blanket around the world. It feels like it is snowing everywhere.

I remembered an old Sufi story about a man who had to spend a freezing night on a mountain top without any clothes on. I can't remember the reason. He'd gotten on the wrong side of a shah or a sultan, something like that. He amazes everyone by surviving the night. He did it by having friends build a big fire on a nearby mountain top and he imagined himself being beside that fire, feeling the heat from it. His imagination and his power of concentration on that fire kept him alive all night.

Myself, I was glad of my warm clothes. I imagined a glowing element inside me, and wrapped my body around it and looked out at the snow. I kept very still. It was different from being in a cabin, sitting in front of a fire, and looking out at the snow. We were sheltered by the roof of the pavilion, but with all the sides open, we were in the open air. Little flurries swirled snowflakes into the pavilion and onto our bodies. Sitting in the Sanctuary, I could follow each big flake as it fell. It was so restful. I lost myself in the falling snow. Very different from getting lost in the snow, eh!?

That's what I wanted to experience: to savour the falling snow. To enjoy the silence and the tranquility. In the Sanctuary, you are safe. There's an easy trail down to the road, and strictly speaking, if you do go off the track below the Sanctuary entrance and get lost in the snow or the dark, as long as you keep going downhill, you'll reach the highway.

Roger Maltenby:

Early this year, in the middle of winter, Reb and Ned and I decided to go to the Sanctuary during a spell of stormy weather. We'd all been in out in bad weather before. This time, we wanted to see how the pavilion handled the power of the storm. Plugging up through the trees was easy enough, but higher up in the open forest, we found ourselves in deep snow and a full-scale blizzard. Luckily, we only had a short distance to go into the wind before the trail turned south, and with the wind at our backs, we reached the Sanctuary without any problems.

The pavilion was sheltered to some extent by the rock face beside it. Snow had piled up on the south, but it was still below the level of the platform, which is about eighteen inches off the ground. When we opened up three sides, there was only a dusting of snow inside. Of course, more blew in once we opened it up. We were in full climbing gear, and in the cold, we decided not to take our boots off. We'd each brought a small sitting bench, and that made it just possible to sit on the platform in reasonable comfort.

We sat and let the winds howl around us. It wasn't a quiet time. Every now and again, a gust of wind shook the pavilion, but it stood up to everything. It was great to just sit there and

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feel the force of the wind and the blowing snow and not feel threatened by it. As Reb said, it was totally awesome. We got a fairly good idea of what it's like on the ridge in mid-winter. That's what I call getting a sense of the place. I must admit, those were extreme conditions, and I can't say it was necessary to experience them. You can get a sense of the mountains, a sense of the natural forces and processes at work in the world by going to the Sanctuary when it's warm and sunny, and on grey and wet and windy days, or when there's snow and the temperature's around freezing.

Still, checking out the extremes was part of the motivation for our trip in the blizzard. Another time, at twenty below zero, Ned found it pretty well impossible to sit. With the wind chill, it must have been thirty below or more. In the pavilion, he was sheltered from the worst of the wind. The trail wasn't in great shape then, with hard ice on the top section. He was fine with crampons and iceaxe, but most people don't go to the Sanctuary with climbing gear. And most people—sensible ones—don't go to the Sanctuary in a blizzard.

Rebecca Watson:

Ned and Tak and Alice and I had a different kind of experience last summer, while we were all working on the MindBody Space. We went up to Sanctuary after we'd had supper in Grenville and it was just getting dark. We sat up on the high point of the ridge, above the shelf the pavilion is on, and watched the sky getting darker and the first stars come out. The weather was perfect and the sky was clear. We'd had a long stretch of good weather and it was lovely and cool after the heat of the day.

After a while, we lay down on the rock. We had sleeping bags and air mattresses, so we were quite comfortable. Away from the lights of the city, I'm always amazed at how many stars there are. The sky is full of stars you never see in the city. It's packed with more stars than I ever thought possible. Billions. Trillions. Gazillions. In the beginning, I couldn't avoid seeing patterns and constellations. I tried to disregard the ones I knew, the obvious ones like the Big Dipper, and just be aware of the stars as a whole. Let myself feel a sense of wonder at the universe.

Then I might look at a star. See what's around it. It was hard not to see the Milky Way. That's OK. I looked at each star in it. Followed it across the sky. Listened for the "sound" of the stars. I don't know what I heard. Did I hear a louder sound where the sky seems full of stars; softer where there is more blackness? Sometimes, that's how it seemed, but of course, it was all in my head. I tried to see the sky in 3D. The sky is not a dark roof over us. It is an enormous three-dimensional space extending farther than we can see. It extends back in time for millions and billions of years.

Every now and then I shut my eyes. I rested for a few moments, and then opened my eyes again. I tried to look at the stars without thinking about them, or myself. Just seeing pinpoints of light in the vastness of the sky. I tried to see, or at least, sense things in a new way. I tried to shut off my mind and be aware of the night with all my body. Looking, listening, feeling, smelling what was around me at that very moment. It's something Alicia

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called “nonconceptual awareness.” It was hard. I don’t think I saw or heard anything with my body, but for few moments, when I looked up at the sky right above me, and kept looking, I could almost believe I could feel the rotation of the earth. It was a strange feeling. I think it was pretty much in my head!

And then I came back to Earth and became aware of all that’s on Earth. All the people, and all the living creatures and plants on land and in the sea. Sometimes, I could lose myself completely. I felt like a speck of dust, not a person or a body—just a living organism, so tiny in the Universe.

The funny thing is, when I came back to myself, I didn’t feel helpless or powerless or totally insignificant. I felt my life had meaning, and purpose. I can do something. I can lead my life. And I have to. It’s strange, but that experience is refreshing and strengthening.

Sooner or later I fell asleep and had a wonderful night’s sleep. Even though we’d stayed awake quite late, we woke up again when the sun was coming up. We’d seen that before when we were at the Sanctuary, but it’s always another wonderful time of day. Then we packed up and went into Grenville for breakfast. It had been a great thing to do.

Ned Kinloch:

I was at the Base one day, and a guy started asking a lot of questions. He’d heard about the Sanctuary and he’d come out to have a look around. He sounded interested, but also skeptical. You could hear it in his tone of voice.

He said "So you walk up the mountain and sit there."

"Yes."

"And do nothing."

"Just sit."

"What happens?"

"It depends. On the light. On the wind. Mainly on what you take up there. Inside you. Perhaps nothing. Try it."

“What should I take up there?”

“Yourself.”

“What do you get out of going there?”

“We’re changing the world.”

That stopped him for a minute, but he went off up the trail. Some time later, I saw him come done again.

I asked him what happened.

“Nothing.”

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“That’s a good start.”

“I’m not sure how you’re changing the world.”

“Well, it’s going to take a few years. Around fifty to a hundred. If we have that long.”

“That makes sense.”

“You should try it again in the fall.”

“Maybe.”

I don’t know if he ever did.

Healing

Greg Voinovic:

I went to the Sanctuary about four weeks after my heart operation. When I was young, I spent a lot of time in the mountains, and I always felt good there. Some of the best times in my life were in the mountains. So when I was recovering from the operation, and I felt strong enough, I asked a friend to go with me to the Sanctuary. It was lucky it was summer, because I wanted to go on a sunny day.

We walked up to the ridge very, very slowly. It felt OK. At the Sanctuary, I rested and let myself relax completely. I tried to get a sense of my heart being healed. The healing power of nature, of the earth, of Gaia. I tried to feel it. Let it come into my body and help all the cells of the heart grow strong. Let the scars of the operation heal up. I sat there and tried to visualize the healing. I felt it was wrapping around me and entering me. After about half an hour, I got tired sitting, so I laid down on the platform. And I let myself feel the warmth of the sun, the energy coming into my body. It felt great.

It might have all been in my imagination, but when I got up, I felt much better. Not cured, of course. I wasn't as if I threw away my crutches and shouted "Hallelujah!" I just felt that it had been the right thing to do. The walk back down was easy. And the next weekend, I did the same thing again. We were lucky to be able to sit and lie there for an hour before anyone else came. And I went to the Sanctuary two other times after that, feeling better each time, and by then I was pretty well back to normal.

So I've made a sort of resolution to go the Sanctuary at least once every summer now, to connect with nature, just like they say, and feel stronger and energized. I think it's a great way to start the summer.

The other aspect of that is that it made me realize how important it is to do something in return, to become active in protecting the Earth and help to keep it clean and strong and healthy, too.

Adam Michaels:

I've got a friend, this guy Danny, he's disabled. He was hurt in a car crash and he's been in a wheelchair ever since. He asked me once about this Sanctuary. He'd heard about it, and he liked the sound of it. I didn't know anything about it, so I couldn't say much. Anyway, I was talking to another friend. He'd heard about it, and Danny really wanted to go, so Kev and me went there and we saw what it was like, and Kev figured the two of us could probably push a wheelchair up the trail. There were a couple of steep places and bumpy places, but we figured we could do it.

So we set it up with Danny. He's only got one good arm, and he gets around in his wheelchair all the time, but not to places like that. We didn't know if it was allowed or not, or if you had to ask permission; we figured we'd just go there and see what happened.

We had to wait a bit for decent weather, and then we went for it. The first part was no sweat. Kev and I took turns pushing, and when we came to a corner, we both had to push and pull to get Danny round to get him lined up. The trail was bumpy in places. It wasn't made for wheelchairs, but it was OK.

We came to another sharp corner, and there were a couple of people coming down the trail, and when they saw us, they stopped and helped us get Danny round the corner! They went back up a bit with us to another steeper bit. With four of us pulling and pushing, it was no problem.

When we got to the shelter, we lifted Danny into it, and we all sat there. I didn't know what I was supposed to do. I thought it was pretty boring. It's just mountains and stuff. I wanted to get up and move around. My legs were killing me! You know, we were sitting cross-legged. That's how Kev said you're supposed to sit. He told me to shut up and just sit with my legs hanging over the edge of the platform. That was better, and I guess I got used to sitting there not doing anything. Then Kev said half an hour was up. Danny—he didn't want to leave! He loved it there! So we stayed a bit longer. Then some other people arrived, and we got Danny back in the chair and went back down again. That was easy.

Danny told other people in a rehab program about his trip. He was with a bunch of people, and they wanted to go, too. The problem was, we didn't have enough guys to do the pushing and pulling to get them up there. Except, one of the guys, Cody Walters, played for the local junior hockey team. I said he should ask some of the other guys on the team to help. You know, a bunch of young guys—strong, in good shape—they could do it easily. It'd sort of be a community relations thing. That'd be good for the team.

So he spoke to the guys, and they said OK. The team wanted to know all about it. They didn't want anyone to get hurt, you know, any of the players. Or any of the people in wheelchairs, I suppose. And it had to be at a good time in the schedule; not before a big game or anything like that. So there was a lot of stuff going on, and then it was in the local paper. You know, great publicity for the club. Everyone loved the idea. I guess someone contacted the Sanctuary people, and it was all arranged.

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So they got a bus and there were six disabled people. Danny was one of them. And some seniors who were in wheelchairs and couldn't get around much. And all these guys from the club. Someone brought along some ropes, figuring it would make it easier to pull the wheelchairs up. A woman from the Sanctuary suggested we take the people up in small groups—two or three at a time. There wasn't room up there for more than that, with all the helpers. So the others waited down below in the Shelter building. And then we took the next bunch up. Most of them just sat in their chairs beside the pavilion and some we helped onto the platform. Only about half the seniors went to the top. The others stayed down below, in a little garden down by the road.

The guys on the team—they got the wheelchairs up there no trouble at all. And most of them sat there, on the rocks, while they were waiting. Others went up on to the top of the ridge and walked around a bit.

There was a woman from the paper who came along, and a guy with a camera, too. So we were on the news that night. The disabled people said it was a terrific experience, and it was good for the club, too. We didn't set it up originally as a publicity stunt or anything like that. It was a community thing.

Mind Body Spirit Nature

Alicia Tyndall:

The MindBody Space is a marvellous place to do yoga. For yoga, strictly, you do not need anything more than a floor, perhaps a wall, and a small space. When one does doing yoga, the focus is internal. On breathing and muscles; the position of the arms and legs, of the entire body. The surroundings do not matter at all. Nevertheless, when I enter the MindBody Space and look out through the high windows at the trees, at the sky, especially when the weather is good, I feel my spirits rise. Before I have even started. Early in the morning, on clear days, the sunlight comes in through the trees and warms the whole room. Especially in spring and fall, and even in winter, it is so enjoyable to do yoga in the sunlight.

Of course, that is my so many of the yoga tapes and CDs show people doing tai chi on a beach or in the desert or some other beautiful location. And most of the spas and retreat centres where you can do yoga are in beautiful places. But we cannot all go off to those beautiful places very often, so it is wonderful to have the MindBody Space so close. You do not have to book a time, at least not yet, and it is free and open to everyone.

I often come to the MindBody Space with three friends, and we start the day with an hour of yoga. We all do different styles of yoga, but that does not matter. After we are warmed up—flexible and full of energy—we walk up to the Sanctuary.

We walk slowly, and I usually look around at everything along the trail. On most occasions, before I know it, I am at the Sanctuary! It seems effortless. I sit there, not meditating, simply aware of so much around me. I am hardly aware of myself at all. And then we walk down the

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ridge and up the trail to the Viewpoint. My energy fades a little as we go up the last steep section of the trail to the Viewpoint, but it comes back when I look up the valley and my spirit grows big again. From there, you can see the high peaks extending along the horizon, far beyond Lake Bryson to the west. I feel my whole day had expanded, from the MindBody Space, wider from the Sanctuary, and then wider again. It is wonderful when that happens.

We walk back to the Sanctuary and down to the Base again where we do some restorative poses. At the end of my yoga practice, I lie down in savasana, the Corpse Pose. I relax totally, with my eyes closed, for five or ten minutes. Once, I lay down close to the windows, and when I opened my eyes and sat up at, the first thing I saw were the treetops and the sky. The trees had never seemed so green. And the sky was so blue! I had never seen the colours, the sunlight and the shade so intense before. I felt as if I was in another world. I wanted to walk straight out into it. To walk among those trees.

Well, if you walk out through the open windows, you will fall six feet off the edge! I put my shoes on and went home with my friends. But that intensity remained with me, with everything I noticed on the way home, for the rest of the day. That is how my mind and body and nature come together for me.

Rebecca Watson:

I love the MindBody Space, especially when we have the windows open. Even though you're not looking at the view outside, it feels so good to be part of nature as you move, as you breathe. Sometimes the sunlight bounces off the floor and reflects up to the rafters. And when you have people doing tai chi, their shadows swirl up under the roof and they seem to be almost weightless.

Speaking of shadows, we had an amazing experience one day last winter. We don't use the Space when it gets very cold and snowy, but we'd had some warmer weather, and even though there was snow on the ground, the road was clear, and a group of us came to do tai chi for a couple of hours.

Well, it got dark early, but we'd brought some candles and lanterns that we'd made for the last Fall Equinox. We knew we had to be very careful about fire, and we'd made trays for the lanterns so that if they got knocked over, they wouldn't fall directly onto the floor. We put them on the floor at the back of the Space so we had room to move, and they gave us just enough light to keep going. And it was fantastic! It created a whole, different mood. It felt as if we were moving underwater. You could see our shadows moving over the snowy trees outside, like giants. We even took turns to run outside and see the shadows dancing over the windows while everyone else kept doing tai chi.

Much earlier, we'd talked about adding some lights so we could use the Space when it was dark. One suggestion was to get a pedal-powered LED light generator, or put some solar panels on the rock bluffs higher up the ridge and string wires down to the building. But after doing tai chi with the lanterns, they were so much neater, we decided we didn't want lights at all!

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We didn't use the MindBody Space much during the winter. It was just too cold and there was too much bad weather and snow and ice on the road. But you'd be surprised at how warm you can get doing tai chi, or chi gong, even when it's nearly freezing outside. It takes a while to warm up, but it gives tai chi and chi gong a real intensity. Do it slowly, move very slowly, focus intensely on what you're doing. You start with a warm jacket and pants and wool socks and booties. Then, you find yourself taking your jacket off because you're too hot. Amazing energy!

Denise Lara:

One morning this spring, when I was staying at our cabin on Kanangra Creek, I walked over to the MindBody Space early in the morning. The sun was rising through the trees, but the Space was cold, so I started walking around, not very quickly, just fast enough to get warm. It was almost hypnotic. I walked and walked, and kept on walking until I could feel the warmth of the sun. The Space was full of light. It came in and filled the whole space, right to the back. I was all alone, and it felt wonderful to have the space all to myself. I felt I was swimming in sunlight. I didn't want to stop moving. If I stopped, it would break the spell.

Finally I did stop, and put my mat down and did some yoga. At the end, I lay down in the middle of the floor and stretched out in the sunlight. I was still lying there when Sandy and a group of her friends arrived. I didn't hear them come in, and when they saw me lying there, absolutely still, they rushed over to see that that I was all right. I tried to jump up right away and tell them everything was all right. They knew that lying down and relaxing is often the way to end a yoga session, but we had to laugh about all the terrible things that jumped into their heads as soon as they saw me. It was still quite cool outside, and it was so lovely and warm in the Space that everyone lay in the sun for a few minutes before they began their yoga.

Takao Matsushima:

Essentially, you have to decide to spend half a day getting to the Sanctuary, sitting, doing some yoga or chi gong, and going for a short hike. You have to organize your time, your weekly schedule, your list of chores and obligations to make time for it.

That gives it real, practical value. A half day every couple of weeks; it's not much time really. Four to five hours. If you have one thirty-minute coffee break a day, that's seven hours every two weeks. If you go to the fitness club or gym for an hour three times a week, that's six hours in two weeks.

I haven't gone to the Sanctuary on a regular basis, but when I go, I make it an easy, relaxed half-day. I enjoy the drive out to Grenville. I don't take the Skyline Highway, I take a back road that's not as busy and more scenic. I go up to the Sanctuary first.

I walk up the trail to the Sanctuary quite slowly. I find it an excellent way to "leave the city behind" by looking around me as I move upwards thru the deep forest and gradually come up into the open forest and finally arrive at the ridge. As I go through the gate, I stop and

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take several deep breaths; then I consciously relax. I stop again when I first see the pavilion, and I look at the view: the gravel path leading over to the pavilion, the rocky outcrop beside it, the scattered trees, and the mountains across the valley. I find it's a good form of preparation. Then I sit.

When I start to sit, I look around and get a sense of the time of day, the weather, the season, the general feel of the time and place. Sometimes I just look out in front of me. Other times, I pick something to focus on, and I'll contemplate that for a while. It's not very long, but that's where the preparation pays off. I'm ready to meditate and for some reason, I find it easier to meditate at the Sanctuary than at most other places.

I usually go down the ridge and do a fast walk up to the Hawk River Viewpoint. If I'm going to make it a longer day, I'll have lunch there and go down the long way to the campground and back up to the Sanctuary. It's all good exercise. Then I may sit there again, or go down to the MindBody Space and do some chi gong. That's something I've learned from Reb in the last two years.

That's how the whole project has been for me. It's interesting how much I've learned, with my Asian background, from Ned and Alicia about things like Japanese gardens and contemplation and meditation. When I thought I knew a lot about those things. And even from Reb. She showed us chi gong exercises, and she's been teaching Ned tai chi as well. I've learned so much, and I'm getting more exercise than I ever did before. It's good all round!

Ned Kinloch:

Living in the city, grabbing twenty minutes here, an hour there when you get a chance, to meditate, to get some exercise—it's not the same. They're useful, but they don't have the same charge as the time at the Sanctuary and in the Park. I don't think I'm the only person to think, or claim that. You can sit anywhere, do yoga anywhere, and go for a run anywhere, but the cumulative pleasure and well-being from the Sanctuary experience in the natural setting more than makes up for the effort of getting to the mountains from the city, and means more to me than all those other separate activities.

I've found that doing tai chi and chi gong, then sitting in the Sanctuary, and then going for a hike or a climb, or going kayaking is a terrifically energizing combination. It's very hard to describe the full impact because it's more than just physical. The combination makes for a deeper and more fulfilling experience. It's not the same as seven days and seven nights in the wild, but it's enough for the modern city-dweller. There's heightened awareness, of oneself and of everything around you. There's an exhilaration that must be close to what people have described in profound religious experiences. And that's what brings us back to the new spiritual connection to the natural world, through a sense of place, and a sense of self, a sense of humanity, in the natural world. Combining old traditions and modern knowledge. Stillness and movement. Meditation and action – yoga, tai chi, physical exercise.

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In a motorized world, in our obese, diabetic culture, it's important to pay attention to our bodies. After years of neglect, only recently has exercise become a major focus of medical attention. Oh, doctors have known that it's important for years. For centuries probably. But if a pill would fix an immediate problem, then take a pill. Not surprisingly, the whole health care industry has promoted that approach.

So now exercise is prescribed. It's almost punishment for many people, I'm sure. But it's possible to find pleasure there. Getting our minds and bodies to work together, each one contributing to the well-being of the other, that's what we have to do. Stillness for mental health; movement for physical health. Take both back to our daily lives.

I've developed a half day routine for when I'm working the late shift. I warm up with a stretch sequence, then I do tai chi for half an hour and follow up with a chi gong sequence. Then it's up to the Sanctuary. Walking up to the Sanctuary, you're moving away from the everyday world. You're leaving worries and concerns behind you. You're going to a place where you can be quiet and peaceful. Where you don't have to think of anything.

I sit for half an hour or more, then I follow the ridge, staying on the rocks above the Viewpoint Trail, and scramble up Matheson. Then back to Sanctuary again and down to the MindBody Space. If I've got time, I'll sit for a last twenty minutes in the Seven Stones Garden. That's a good morning's exercise. Getting the mind *and* body going—it's a great feeling. Of course, that's one of the great pleasures of climbing. It's focussed mind and body work. Checking every foothold and handhold, the route ahead, up a face or up a glacier. Keeping an eye on the weather. It can be tiring, but when conditions are good, it's exhilarating.

Once, Reb and I went further for a full day. We warmed up in the MindBody Space, sat, and then went over the top of Matheson and pushed on along the west ridge to the Matheson - Madsen col and up the other side. We had to do some route finding, back and forth across the face until we found a gully we could climb safely without a rope. That took us back to the ridge and one last step—a bit iffy, close to the limit of unroped climbing—that put us on the knob at the end of the Madsen Range. Not a peak with a name on it, just the shoulder of Mt. Rees. From there it was a rough scramble down to south side trail along the Hawk River. We were still feeling strong, so we came up the switchbacks to the Viewpoint and back through the Sanctuary to the Base. Another time, with Alicia, we drove around to Samilkawen Campground and hiked up into the Buchan meadows where we sat again. That's a favourite place of Alicia's, and there are a number of short scrambles along that face of Buchan.

At the end of a full day, even if we're beat, I like to sit in the Seven Stones Garden. Just for fifteen minutes. Breathing deeply, focussing on the rocks and the gravel, the mountains and the sea. It's a quiet way to end the day. And at the end, focussing internally, on all the energy I've generated and used up during the day, it does feel like I'm recharging my batteries. Not that these sitting and hiking or scrambling days are all that tiring. They're almost like training days, but with the combination of tai chi and sitting and scrambling, they feel great.

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Now, I don't have any scientific measurement of what it all means; how much faster I can walk or run or ski. I don't have any measurement of how much better I feel. But I'm not trying to prove anything scientifically. All I know is that I feel great after a morning at the Sanctuary and that feeling, that energy lasts. Other people agree.

In fact, in our Co-op meetings, we usually start with a short ten minutes of sitting and then a couple of minutes of deep breathing. Most people stretch and a few do a brief chi gong or yoga exercise. We haven't solved the world's problems yet, so I don't know if it's making a difference or not. But we sure know how to talk.

Service

Sandy Colborne:

One of the best things that has happened in the year since we finished the MindBody Space is the way so many people—members of the Morning Light Co-op—are happy to volunteer their time and effort to maintain the building and the grounds, and to do all sorts of little chores that have to be done from time to time. Everything is still very new, of course, so there's not an awful lot to do.

Most of the chores are very easy: opening the MindBody Space in the morning, sweeping the floor if necessary, checking the grounds and picking up leaves and branches after storms, things like that. And closing up at the end of the day. We have a schedule on the website and we haven't had any shortage of volunteers to open up in the morning or close down at night. In summer, that means very early starts and late nights, but this is such a lovely place to come to for a few hours. People get to practice their yoga, and many of us love being here in the early mornings and in the dusk. I think the Space is loveliest at those times.

During the week, many of the volunteers are older, retired people. Not all of them, mind you. It's understandable. It's easier to get here if you don't have kids to get to school or look after. Weekends are a mix of young and old. There are more people going to the Sanctuary then, and more people in the MindBody Space.

Ned and Roger and others check the trail to the Sanctuary regularly in the fall and again early in spring. Especially after heavy rain or storms, they clear trees and branches off the trail, and check for washouts. When snow comes, they check the trail and post a sign at the trailhead about the condition of the trail. That's on the website as well. Snow isn't much of a problem when it's fresh. It's afterwards, after warmer temperatures and melting that it gets icy and slippery. When there's more than a foot of packed snow at the Sanctuary, we have to close the trail and the Sanctuary. Last winter, I think it was closed for most of December and January.

So there are always a bunch of small things to do throughout the year, and major cleanups—washing the windows—once or twice a year at least. We've talked about them in meetings and in the forum on the web, and nobody—none of the volunteers at least—sees them as

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terrible chores. We see them as a form of community service. That was one aspect of the Sanctuary: it's a gift to Skyline Park, so maintaining it and the Base is all part of our community service. And we love it. So many people want to feel part of a community, to do something positive for the community. And this doesn't involve politics or religion; it's not for personal gain or money, or impressing the neighbours. It's not for the sake of the children or anyone else. It's simply an enjoyable thing to do for personal happiness and health, and for the good of everyone else who'd like to enjoy the Sanctuary and Skyline Park.

Alicia Tyndall:

Both the Sanctuary and the MindBody Space have been everything I hoped they would be. We have maintained the original principles of simplicity and touching lightly on the land. I think those principles are important, even as the world changes and evolves.

Some members of the co-operative go to the Sanctuary on a regular basis. Once a month, sometimes more often. And many come regularly to the MindBody Space. It fits very well the concepts that Ned described. We have no facilities for a weekly retreat or anything like that, but it is an excellent place to practice what one has learned in a retreat, or to build on one's retreat or course experiences. It seems easier to remember, or recreate those experiences in a beautiful setting like this than in a regular studio or home space. By travelling here, one makes a commitment to practice and learning without familiar distractions. And the Sanctuary and Skyline Park provide more opportunities for healthy and enjoyable physical activity in a beautiful natural environment.

Some casual visitors have asked about yoga or tai chi classes. On the noticeboard, we suggest they take classes wherever they live and come back here to practice what they have learned. That is not easy for tourists from other parts, perhaps, but it is not difficult for people from nearby towns or the city. To come back here, that is. At least, it might provide a small boost for yoga and tai chi teachers wherever they are.

I am always very happy when someone comes from far away, someone who has heard of the Sanctuary and the MindBody Space, and they come here to sit and to do yoga for an hour. Or more. It is not only our connections to the natural environment that are important. It is our connections to people. To the local community, and to people around the country and the world.

In a little more than a year, we have seen the birth of a community. A small community, but full of enthusiasm, and generosity and a sense of responsibility. We are still learning. It will be interesting to see what more we learn as the community grows.

