

Berger, R. (2016). Nature Therapy: A Framework that Incorporates Nature, the Arts and Ritual in Therapy (Chapter 2). In *Green Studio: Nature and the Arts in Therapy* // Eds. A. Kopytin, and M. Rugh. Happaage, NY: Nova Science Publishers.

Chapter 2

**NATURE THERAPY: A FRAMEWORK THAT
INCORPORATES NATURE, THE ARTS AND
RITUAL IN THERAPY**

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents Nature Therapy, a creative therapeutic discipline, which takes place in nature and relates to it as a partner in the therapeutic process. Relating to concepts from eco-psychology, ritual and drama therapy the chapter presents the fundamental concepts of the framework and demonstrates its possible applications to various populations. It highlights how the integration of nature can broaden, deepen and advance the therapeutic process. The chapter affirms that Nature Therapy is an autonomous and independent framework, as well as serving as a model that can be utilized in arts therapies in general and in drama therapy in particular.

Keywords: nature, Nature Therapy, ritual, drama therapy

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BACK TO NATURE

In the past, before the scientific revolution, Freud and modern therapy, individualism and capitalism, ritual was used in the process of healing, transformation and development. It was used to help people recover from illness and pain, deal with uncertainty in life and change their social status. These rituals included a creative and artistic as well as a physical and spiritual encounter with elements from nature. They were all combined in a wider framework of traditional medicine and the social, religious and ecological parameters of the tribe. A great many of these rituals took place in nature and others, such as those performed to accompany the birth of a baby, took place in a tent or hut. In most rituals, clear reference was made to physical and spiritual elements of nature and their significance in the advancement of recuperation, change and development (Berger, 2014; Eliade, 1959; Evans, 1997; Hazan, 1992; Jennings, 1995; Meged, 1998; Turner, 1986).

The ritual was based on a creative, mind-body experience and took place in non-verbal ways, including drama, story, dance, music and visual arts (like displays, totems, decorations and statues) represented by the shaman. Thus, various theorists from the realm of art therapy relate to ritual as the forerunner of drama therapy, while some refer to art therapy as a type of modern ritual replacing the traditional ritual in a variety of ways (Jennings, 1995, 1998, 2012; Marcow-Speiser, 1998; McNiff, 1979, 1992). Is it possible that the integration of nature into arts-based therapy is actually a return to something that has always existed but has been undervalued or lost?

As early as the mid-twentieth century, some psychoanalysts recognized the healing power of nature and used it to assist in therapy. Erikson, one of Freud's leading students and an important theoretician in his own right, was assisted by experiential encounters in nature to advance his own recovery and healing processes in dealing with paralysis resulting from polio. Following his positive experience, his understanding and the respect he developed for the natural healing power found in nature, he harnessed nature for his work with patients, sending them for hikes in the mountains as part of the therapeutic process (Kinder, 2002). Later on, a number of other art therapists, such as Taylor (1998) and Whitaker (2010) integrated nature into their work and used it as a source of creative material and as a background for a creative process.

In contrast, adventure therapy has developed mainly through educational work with youth and adults having trouble dealing with boundaries and authority (Berger 2009; Garst, Scheider & Baker, 2001; Kaly & Heesacker,

2003). In most cases it seems adventure therapy relates to nature as a backdrop or as a setting supplying challenges appropriate to specific task-based work methods. Dealing with these challenges may aid in team-building, development of coping resources, communication skills, connecting to one's strengths and other resources. Recently the use of adventure therapy has expanded to special needs populations, families, women suffering from anorexia, and people dealing with psychiatric illnesses. Nevertheless, it appears that most applications of adventure therapy remain in the realm of education and empowerment, and less in clinical-therapeutic work (Berger, 2009; Richards, Peel, Smith & Owen, 2001; Burg, 2001; Bandoroff, 2003). Adventure therapy does not generally emphasize the emotional, spiritual, physical and metaphysical elements existing in nature as it centers on work which is concrete, behavioral and task-oriented (Berger, 2009; Beringer & Martin, 2003).

In recent years, due to the negative effects of technological development on a variety of social and environmental processes, relations between people and nature have gained increasing recognition (Berger, 2009; Chown 2014; Kellen-Taylor, 1998; Rozak, 2001; Gomez & Kanner, 1995; Totton, 2003). Research has shown that the frayed relations between people and nature create a void in their feelings of general welfare and psychological well-being. It appears that estrangement from nature is related to an increase in life intensity, which also leads to a rift in the mind-body relationship, in how we listen to ourselves and others, and in the possibilities for living a full and authentic life (Chown, 2014; Kellen-Taylor 1998; Kuhn, 2001; Pillisuk & Joy, 2001; Roszak et al., 1995; Roszac, 2001).

The developing realm of eco-psychology reflects this approach in its socio-psycho-ecological philosophy, which maintains that "reconnection" with nature is necessary not only for its conservation and for the physical existence of the planet's landscape, cultures, habitats, animals and plants, but also to maintain human welfare and happiness. At the basis of this outlook lies the argument that strengthening the relationship with nature can reduce depression and anxiety and foster the experience of a more complete sense of continuity, happiness and wonder (Berger & Tiry, 2012; Chown, 2014; Gomes & Kanner, 1995; Kellen-Taylor, 1998; Totton, 2003). Many professionals have examined the healing aspects of nature and the therapeutic power associated with nature in general (Abram, 1996; Beringer & Martin, 2003; David, 1998; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Roszac, 2001; Totton, 2003) and some in art-based therapy in particular (Berger & Lahad, 2010, 2013; Berger & Tiry, 2012; Chown 2014; Kellen-Taylor 1998; Whitaker 2010). However, few have conceptualized the

knowledge gained in practice and through intuition, and turned it into a therapeutic framework, a method and a profession in its own right, relating to nature as a partner in the process.

NATURE THERAPY – A THEORETICAL AND AN APPLIED FRAMEWORK

Nature Therapy is a creative therapeutic framework which takes place in nature, perceiving it as a partner in constructing a therapeutic setting and process (Berger, 2009; Berger & Lahad, 2013; Berger & Tiry, 2012; Berger & McLeod, 2006). This integrative method was conceptualized and developed by the author of this chapter for his PhD degree, using an active research and reflexive process, incorporating his personal experience as a human being, therapist and a researcher (Berger, 2009). The method integrates elements from creative and post-modern therapies, such as drama therapy, Gestalt and the narrative approach, along with principles of traditional ritual. Nature Therapy created a theory and models which assist the therapist working in nature to create a therapeutic setting, and whose unique characteristics aid the therapist to advance and broaden the therapy.

Like other post-modern approaches which have developed social theories in order to explain the expansion of psychological distress such as depression, anxiety and trauma (Cushman, 1990; Gergen, 1991; McLeod, 1997; West, 2000), Nature Therapy developed a theory which views the process from a psycho-eco-social perspective. This perspective stems from a perceived connection between people's estrangement from nature as well as the lack of community life and spiritual outlook, producing a wide-ranging spread of psycho-social distress and manifestations, such as loss of self-esteem and meaning, depression, anxiety, loneliness, and alienation. In turn, this leads to intervention approaches and methods with an environmental-creative-social basis, attempting to strengthen the mind-body connection and inter-personal relationships along with self-inclusion and normalization skills.

At the heart of Nature Therapy and in accordance with fundamental assumptions of eco-psychology and deep-ecology, lies the assertion that, by reconnection with nature people can link to healing forces and recovery (Roszak, 2001; Totton, 2003). The most basic term used in Nature Therapy is "*touching nature*." This term implies that direct contact and relations with nature can deepen a person's contact and relations with his/her inner nature

i.e., feel authenticity and develop important personal elements which might have been difficult to express given the intensity of modern life (Berger, 2005).

Example 1: Between the Cycles

Brian, a 65-year-old retired social worker, participated in a Nature Therapy workshop in Scotland designed for professionals. The opening session was set between a forest and the beach. The participants stood in a circle, listening to their breathing, the wind, and the waves. When people were invited to say something about themselves and their reasons for coming to the workshop, Brian shared his feelings of sadness, fear, and doubts about the future: “Now that my children have left home and are parents themselves and I have retired, it is difficult for me to find purpose and value in my life. Sometimes I wake up in the morning and do not know what to do. I wonder if this is the time to depart and die.”

The next day on the beach, after some mind-body activities using elements from tai-chi, chi-kong and guided imagery while listening to the whisper of the waves and sand movement, helping them to connect to their own bodies and to the surrounding nature, I suggested to Brian to take a meditative-walk imagining each step he took in the sand as a chapter in his ongoing journey through life. When he returned from his walk, Brian had a calm expression on his face as he told the group that he had reached the conclusion that he was not yet ready to depart.

When other group participants asked him about his tear-filled eyes, he said that he was sad to have realized that a few important cycles of his life had been completed and that he did not know how to continue or what to do now. In order to explore the subject in a creative, non-cognitive fashion, I offered Brian the chance to continue his earlier work by finding a suitable space within the larger group space that had been formed on the sand, where he created a two-faced sculpture: one side relating to the past, and the other symbolizing the future. I asked him to start by closing his eyes and listening to the mantra of the waves, while letting his imagination lead him.

An hour later, as we walked among the participants’ creations, listening to their stories, Brian said, “I really enjoyed this creative exercise, as I totally lost my sense of time. At first, I did not like it since the image of a memorial came up, but then it changed into images from my childhood, when we were playing on the beach and building castles on the sand.” When I asked about his

creation, he said, “I did not compose anything as I could not control the sand. I tried to build a castle but the sand kept slipping. In the beginning, it frustrated me but then I realized it’s like the changes I am dealing with in my life, the time I cannot stop and its impact. Realizing this I stopped and sat down, being present and looking at two sea gulls fighting, watching the tide coming in and the last rays of the sun. This is the first time in many years that I have taken the time to be – to stop and observe all of this; life is beautiful ...”

Conceptualization

Brian’s story shows how the direct and creative connection with nature, being in nature and witnessing elements in nature can help a person connect with himself, expand his perspective, find meaning and hope. It highlights both the way that the concept of “touching nature” can be used and the unique way of relating to nature as a partner in the process. The example can be seen as a major step in Brian's process of finding his place in nature while the therapist and the group took background positions as witness and container. The example also shows how art can be integrated into the process, offering Brian the chance to build a sand sculpture that represented his past and future. The struggle he had with the sand led him to the realization that we lack control over time and that the changes it brings are uncontrollable. At the same time the “being” in nature helped Brian to see the beauty around him, to reconnect with inner strength and with a sense of control over his life. This led Brian to expand his perspective on the issue he came to the workshop with and helped him to connect to hope and joy. This facilitation style, incorporating direct contact with nature and art-making while the therapist and group remain in the background, is one of the basic characteristics of Nature Therapy. It relates to the second Nature Therapy concept: the triangular relationship; therapist-client-nature relationship, which will be presented later.

NATURE AS SETTING AND THERAPEUTIC SPACE

In terms of the ritualistic principles and the concepts of "sacred space" (Berger & McLeod, 2006; Pendzik, 1994) and the healing elements of nature (Berger, 2009), one of the basic concepts of Nature Therapy is that nature can serve as a healing and therapeutic space. According to this concept, the autonomous healing elements in nature (water, wind, fire, earth as well as

elements relating to cosmic laws and cycles, such as birth and death, migration and change) can be used to advance and support links to strengths, normality, relaxation and recovery.

Unlike in other psychotherapeutic disciplines, in Nature Therapy nature is a living and dynamic environment which is not under the control or ownership of either the therapist or the client. It is an open, independent space that existed before them and will remain after their disappearance. This characteristic is significantly different from the classical in-the-room treatment systems, as the room usually belongs to the therapist and is completely under the therapist's control. The room in which therapy takes place has been furnished and designed by the therapist for the therapeutic activity and for meetings with clients, and it usually has no other purpose.

The choice of conducting the therapeutic activity in nature obliges the therapist to relate to these issues on a theoretical, practical and ethical level. This choice not only affects intervention techniques, but also affects the status of the therapist and the process of building a therapeutic alliance, as well as the relationship with the client. The choice of work in nature also affects the type of authority and hierarchy that exists between the therapist, the client and the therapeutic contract (Berger 2014; Berger & Lahad, 2013; Berger & Tiry, 2012).

Example 2: Building a Home in Nature

Yossi (fictitious name), a young boy of twelve with autistic tendencies (PDD), was a pupil in a class for children with learning difficulties in the north of Israel. Yossi had difficulties with verbal communication and problems creating interpersonal contacts. His behavior was inflexible and rigid. For example, he would walk only in certain areas, on certain paths at school and avoid walking on others. He could arrive at class sopping wet because he would not change his fixed route even when the lawns were being watered. At the beginning of the year, when we began to work together, Yossi objected to entering the therapy room and suggested that we meet outside. I agreed, proposing that we go out for walks near the classroom and around the school area, and he consented. I thought that this idea would make Yossi feel that I was joining him and agreeing to his “proposals,” and that my presence would help him to broaden his “movement map” at school and thus develop greater cognitive and motor flexibility. We got to places at school which Yossi had previously avoided and places he had not known about, like the “big yard”

where children played during the breaks. As time went by our walks stretched into the neighboring areas outside the school boundaries. Yossi chose a hidden spot, under a tree on the banks of the Jordan River, about ten minute's walk from the school. This spot was chosen to be the therapeutic setting where our meetings would take place.

The therapy had multiple objectives: to develop and broaden Yossi's verbal communication and emotional skills; to develop his ability to create and maintain an interpersonal relationship; to create a space where he could express and process personal content. As a start to achieving these objectives I decided that our first meetings in nature should focus on lighting a campfire and preparing tea together. Instead of talking about communication and building our relationship, we created and "made" a real relationship. After a number of meetings in nature, Yossi began to build a small circle of sticks, leaves and stones he had found, around the place of the fire. It took about three sessions to complete, define and discern a circle, and when it was completed a change could be seen in Yossi's behavior. There was a significant improvement in his ability to communicate and an advance in his verbal expression, as well as a desire to create a relationship. At that stage, Yossi initiated eye contact with me and the intonation of his speech became softer and more varied.

It appeared that the option he had to choose the site of our work, and later, to create, to define and to delineate a designated and secure personal space for himself in nature was very meaningful for him and contributed to building our relationship. Maintaining the designated circle and preparing our fire and our tea became rituals which took place regularly. Sometimes Yossi asked to make the circle smaller and sometimes to enlarge it. He also asked to change seating places with me and to take on different tasks in making the fire and preparing the tea. Possibly the direct meeting in nature enabled him to feel secure enough to create a trusting relationship.

After some time, when winter came, we took leave of our space on the banks of the Jordan and continued our meetings in the school therapy room. Even then, after a number of difficult, conflicted meetings, he would lead me back to the place in nature, a place which then received the name "the home in nature." One day, when we got there, we saw that the space had changed. The circle had been opened and the sticks had scattered. The leaves had fallen and the banks of the river had been flooded. Yossi looked at the changes and pondered over them. He didn't say anything to me, but from his facial expression I understood that he was wondering whether he could trust me.

Was that the way I had watched over his “home?” Had I been in control? Had he been in control or was it just that way in nature? Should he accept these changes, avoid coming back, or maybe rebuild the space there and then? Encountering the changes in nature and the proof of my lack of control as well as his lack of control led Yossi to share the feelings he had during his parents' divorce. He told me how he had coped with the changes at home and his feelings of helplessness and blame in trying to deal with them. This led us to talk again about our contract and the role nature played in it, and how neither he nor I could completely control and protect our space, our creation and/or the environment. And that in the same way that we could create changes in nature, nature could make its own changes and carry them out. We reached the understanding that the changes brought about by nature were part of the contract and the way we were working in this sacred space which belonged to nature and to us.

Yossi thought about the parallels between the process we went through and processes he was going through at home. This assuaged some of his guilt and allowed him to be more accepting of himself. When the circle around the fire was completed again, we jumped into it together, we looked at each other and we renewed our contact and trust. As a therapist observing the process, it seemed to me that Yossi was trying to fathom whether it was possible to rebuild the safe space which had fallen apart not only in nature but also between us. Was it worth rebuilding the “home in nature” as it had been before, or perhaps, considering our needs, the process and the changing environment, it was possible, and preferable, to build it differently?

Conceptualization

In Yossi's case, building a therapeutic space and maintaining it were central elements in the therapy. It started when the therapist together with Yossi left the familiar school ground and walked to the banks of the river where Yossi could establish a personal therapeutic space of his own. Symbolically, the choice also allowed him to take responsibility for his life, shaping it in a manner which pleased him. Making the choice also enabled Yossi to agree to the entry of an additional person into the framework and letting him remain there in an intimate relationship, which Yossi led. The idea to define and create a separate and unique space within the larger space is linked to the ancient ritualistic idea of “sacred space.” The main function of

this space was to create a safe healing space, hospitable and protected from invasion by evil forces or spirits. This space, which was created by marking it out and clearly separating it from the surroundings, constituted a healing place in itself and a site in which complex ceremonial elements took place (Pendzik, 1994).

This example highlights the idea of the “*building a home in nature*” model (Berger & Lahad, 2013). It's based on: a. the fundamental assumption of nature as a therapeutic space; and b. the basic need of the individual to define and create a separate place for him/herself, protected and familiar, within the wide open spaciousness that can be unfamiliar and sometimes uncertain, and even extremely harsh. This is a basic model in Nature Therapy, which also includes a unique axis for assessment. An additional aspect illustrated by this example is the way nature invites questions of uncertainty, constancy, control and continuity into the therapeutic space.

Yossi's case also demonstrates the potential that exists in the choice and maintenance of a therapeutic space in nature, a central element in Nature Therapy. This relates to another basic Nature Therapy concept titled “*Choosing the Right Space*,” a concept that highlights the importance of the issue of space (and time) in nature therapy in general and of the choice of the specific space and time to work in, in particular (Berger & Lahad, 2013). The assumption that underlies this concept is that different natural habitats and environments have a different impact upon different populations. A beach, a desert or a forest will have a different meaning for different clients in different phases of therapy. An open environment like the beach can be experienced as a space which symbolizes freedom and relaxation for one person while causing anxiety and stress for another person. The choice of the season and the time of day can have a direct impact, and therefore should be taken into consideration in the choice. At sunrise and sunset, the Israeli beach can be a great place to work in as the temperature and atmosphere are pleasant and the symbolism of the environment can connect the person with feeling and thoughts about the cycles of life, offering perspective, acceptance and hope (as well as sadness, loneliness and depression). However, the same beach at noon, the high temperature and direct sunlight can be too intrusive for emotional work and therefore is unsuitable for therapeutic process. The concept of “choosing the right space” helps the therapist take these issues into consideration when choosing a suitable time and environment to work in for the specific client and for the therapeutic goal.

BACK TO RITUAL

One of the unique features of Nature Therapy is its fundamental connection to the concept of ritual and its use in therapy. This applies both to collective ritual ideas, such as the connection between people and nature, between mind-spirit-body and within the community, as well as to the integration of performance and arts into the therapeutic process (Berger, 2014). It also relates to the concept of the sacred space, the idea of 'rite of passage' and the three phases from which rituals are comprised (Berger 2014; Marcow-Speiser, 1998; Van Gennep, 1960).

Recognizing the basic need people have for rituals, like helping them to deal with uncertainty, loss, sickness and transitions in life, and to the role modern therapy plays in the creation of secular rituals (Berger, 2014, Jennings, 2012; Marcow-Speiser, 1998), Nature Therapy incorporates and utilizes elements in nature to create rituals. It generally does not use existing rituals borrowed from various cultures, but creates them according to the culture of the group and connection to the here and now. It utilizes the dynamics and culture of the group, links them to collective and universal phenomena present in nature (such as the change of the seasons, the transitions between high and low tide, sunrise and sunset, birth and death) and uses the natural elements (water, wind, fire, earth) to create rituals that are relevant to the client and group. This approach allows clients to connect their personal to their cosmic stories by giving them a feeling of acceptance, normality and oneness. It can also help people assimilate painful stories, explore their significance in general, and in cases dealing with loss, trauma and stress in particular. The use of rituals can also help participants to connect mind and body, establish a sense of connectedness and oneness within oneself, with the other and with things larger than the self.

Example 3 – Finding my Space, Sounding my Voice

A 'Building a home in nature' workshop - part of a training course for Nature Therapy - took place in a forest in the north of Israel. During the opening ritual, which took place around a circle we had marked off with pine needles, I invited the members of the group to listen to the sounds of the

forest, to be aware of its smells, to experience the taste of the air and to feel

the encounter of the earth and the wind with their bodies. My aim was to heighten their awareness of themselves, their mind-body relationship and to think about the idea of “home” – what it meant for them. I invited each of them to take something from their bags which symbolized home for them, to put it down in the circle and to say something about it.

After this sharing session, I invited them to take a walk through the forest and to find a place that suited each of them and to build “a home in nature.” The guidelines remained open, with my saying that the home could be of any size or form, it could be in any place and could be constructed from any material they wanted. Sharon, a woman in her 50s, returned after a few minutes and sat down on a partly hollow stump of a fallen tree not far from the circle. She asked me, “What do you mean – to build a home?” “That depends on your interpretation,” I answered. “You have time to figure it out,” I said and walked away, giving Sharon space to think about it.

After about half an hour, I went back to visit Sharon and I saw that she had created an area by encircling the tree stump with pine needles and was sitting on the tree stump while energetically writing in her notebook. When I got closer to her she told me what she felt. “It’s great,” she said. “All my life, I have wanted a small house, but my former husband insisted on having a big one. I hated it.” When I asked Sharon to say something about her artistic choices, about her choice of materials and the form of the home she had created, she said, “This tree tells my story. It’s what happened to me in my marriage. I shrank and retreated within myself. I put my dreams aside and I ate myself up from within. I let the complex and painful relations with my former husband harm me and gnaw away at many parts of myself. I became vulnerable, embittered and small, trying not to take up too much space.”

Attempting to create a connection between what was happening in this workshop space and the space of daily life, I proposed to Sharon and to the other members of the group to write a letter to another person who was connected to their story, to put the letter into an envelope with his/her address on it and to give it to me to mail a few days later. Sharon rejected the idea and said that she had already undertaken enough. I left the paper, the pencil and the envelope near her and I invited her to do whatever she wanted during the remaining time. When I returned after a few minutes, Sharon said, “Thank you. This is the first time that I have let myself express (to my former partner) how angry I am at him. I have been holding it inside for too many years, trying to be a good wife and mother, so that the children wouldn’t know. I don’t

know whether I will send the letter to him but I have accomplished a lot just by writing it.”

Later, another participant shared with us what she had experienced while building her home in nature, the feelings and thoughts it had aroused about her divorce, breaking up the home she had loved so much and leaving it. Sharon identified strongly with the story and, in tears, told her own story to the group. After the group had listened and digested the stories, I asked Sharon if she would like us to conduct a spontaneous ritual which would allow her to have another encounter, and perhaps would even be healing and nurturing. She agreed. I invited her to come into the circle which was marked by leaves and by the members of the group and to stand at its center, surrounded by her friends. I asked Sharon to close her eyes and to listen to the wind and to the sounds of the birds in the forest, to be attentive to her breathing, the beating of her heart, and the movement taking place within her. At the same time, I asked the members of the group to come closer to her, to be witnesses to her breathing and movement, and also to allow themselves to gently put a hand on her. Sharon began to move in the circle, at first silently and then, making a sound. I asked her not to stop her movement and sound-making and even to let them grow and intensify. While she was moving, I asked her to tell the group something about the home she was living in. Sharon said, “At the moment I feel that my body is my home. After a long time feeling that I could not really breathe, my breath is coming back, and I have space. I feel like the trees that are surrounding me now. My roots are planted deep in the ground, my trunk is stable and my head, my treetop, is open to the sky and to movement. The sounds of the birds and the smell of the pines remind me of the home where I grew up, my mother and father and the love that ties us together. Maybe I will bring my granddaughters here and show them these trees. After all, being a grandmother is also being a kind of home.”

Conceptualization

The above example illustrated the ways Nature Therapy uses the ritualistic model and approach as a central element in therapy. It shows the use of the sacred space, the work within the fantastic and dramatic reality as well as the incorporation of the three phases of the ritual. The first stage of the work is the departure from the everyday environment and arrival at the workshop, the entrance into and acquaintance with the physical space, i.e., “sacred space,” with the group and with the subject of the workshop. At the second stage, the

encounter with nature and the experiential work enable the individual to explore and express matters that concern him/her within the fantastic and the dramatic space, within the group and through the use of dramatic methods, including an examination of personal matters which may be taboo. The third and final stage involves integration back into the “real world,” processing and creating meaning which is also relevant outside the session (ritual), in the concrete, social world.

The example also demonstrated the use of routine rituals which open and close the meetings, creating a sense of security and order. Its spontaneous aspects, created on the spot, were also evident. The model illustrated the way nature can serve as a space for performing these rituals, as is accepted, for example, in drama therapy, and demonstrated how nature can be integrated into the process and advance it. The specific examples exemplify how elements of nature, like the hollow, fallen tree trunk, the home constructed around it and the chirping of the birds can lead the client to experience deep feelings, recall lost memories, experience the life force of the body and serve as a metaphor for life itself. The example also highlighted how Nature Therapy constitutes a kind of intermodal, integrating a variety of artistic media (writing, drawing, drama, movement, and story) and even moves from one medium to another, using elements from nature as creative materials and as a stage for action.

The *triangular relationship: therapist-client-nature* is another basic Nature Therapy concept, which this example illustrates. This concept seeks to broaden the classical therapeutic relationship between therapist and client by bringing in a third factor – nature. Like the artistic process and the artistic product, which can be regarded as the third element in art therapy, the term “triangular relationship” is conceptualized in the unique context of Nature Therapy. It is intended to aid the therapist in relating to nature as an active partner in the process, affecting not only the design of the therapeutic setting but also the therapeutic process. In this way, it is different from the perception of the artistic product as a third medium in art therapy, because in Nature Therapy, nature plays an active role, having a dynamic and a life of its own, while in art therapy, the medium is under the complete control of the therapist and/or client.

The triangular relationship is intended to support the development of a working approach, which enables the therapist greater movement and flexibility in the therapeutic relationship - to take a central role in the relationship and in the interaction with the client and to be assisted by nature as a backdrop or as a supplier of materials. Alternatively, to take a secondary

role and to serve as a mediator between the client/group and nature, or as a witness to a process occurring directly with nature. In general, it can be said that when the client or group is involved in investigating processes connected with relationships and “communication,” for example, examining questions of trust and control, the therapist can focus on interpersonal interaction and relate to nature as a setting or as a supplier of material.

On the other hand, when the client is concerned with wider questions of identity and meaning, the therapist can invite him/her to interact directly with nature, its cyclicity and its perennial sequences, as s/he remains a witness, seeking to intensify the individual's encounter with nature. Clearly, in many cases, with changes in the dynamics and the issues being examined, the position of the therapist will change. A change in position and attitude which may occur several times during the same meeting also enables the client to move along the axis between the interpersonal and the transpersonal, broadening the framework and perspectives regarding the issues being investigated (Berger, 2008; Berger & Tiry, 2012).

In this chapter *I would like to expand the concept of the triangular relationship to produce an hexagonal relationship*, made up of two identical triangles in the form of a six-pointed star. At the vortexes of one triangle are the three formerly mentioned terms: therapist, client and nature, and on the three other vortexes are the group (when working in a group), art (and the creative-artistic process) and the spiritual dimension – the relationship with the universe and what is greater than oneself. At the center of the hexagon, composed of the meeting of all parts, is the process. Maintaining the structure of the two triangles and the movement between them and their vortexes enables the therapist to choose the axis on which to focus at the various stages of the process and to advance, aided by his/her choice.

Sharon's story in the example above shows how the ritualistic approach in Nature Therapy is linked to the concepts of the triangular and the hexagonal relationship. Contact with all of the hexagonal components appears at all levels of the therapeutic process: the therapist, the client, the group, nature, the creative artistic spiritual work, as well as in the choices of the client, moving among these components and emphasizing each of them at different points in time – whichever s/he feels will be most supportive at any particular stage of the process. It is clear that the therapist and the group may move into the background and serve to maintain the working framework as witnesses and mediators in a process taking place primarily between the client and nature (and creativity). In contrast, when interpersonal processes have greater

significance, the client may change his/her place and become more central in space, as nature becomes the background.

In the context of this chapter, which presents Nature Therapy as an independent method, the examples emphasize the great significance of nature in this process: how the direct meeting with nature, in combination with creativity work and a relationship with the therapist and group work, can help the client bypass cognitive defenses and enable the expression of painful issues. The combination of the course of nature and its cyclical and universal aspects, like high and low tides, sunrise and sunset, decay and renewal, birth and death, enable the participants – who, as mentioned, sometimes come from different cultures and ways of life – to organize themselves around the broad common denominators, universal truths, and natural and collective archetypes which we all know and agree upon. The process helps to create the experience of unity, partnership and participation, supporting the formation of a group and the existence of a safe place, normalized and calming. This aids the development of an atmosphere and a setting, encouraging the generation of a ritual, and agreement on symbols, images and archetypes which aid in the healing process, and are linked to entering a fantastic semi-trance which the ritual may include. This usually operates a-logically through processes linked to the right hemisphere of the brain (Lahad, Shacham, & Ayalon, 2013).

NATURE THERAPY AS A MODEL IN DRAMA THERAPY AND THE OPTION OF INTEGRATING INDOOR- BASED WORK

The possibility of relating to Nature Therapy as a model for art therapy and for drama therapy in particular, was first suggested to me by Prof. Sue Jennings, when she invited me to present the field of Nature Therapy at an international drama therapy conference in Romania in 2011. The notion of a connection between these branches of therapy rests on the ritualistic perception which provides the basis for all of them. This is especially true for Nature Therapy and drama therapy because the concept of “sacred space” and the role of the shaman exist in both types of therapy (Jennings, 1998; Jones, 1996; Gringer, 1995; Berger and McLeod, 2006).

Both Nature Therapy and drama therapy integrate all of the art media: play, drama, movement, visual art, music and story, and thus, constitute a type of intermodal (Lahad, 1995; Berger and Lahad, 2011). Both operate in a

fantastic and dramatic reality (Pendzik, 2006), using dramatic distancing (Landy, 1983; 1996). They work with concepts such as "the hero's journey" (Lahad, 1992), and the "healing metaphor" (Berger & Lahad, 2011), developing resilience and bridging languages (Lahad, 2013). If we view Nature Therapy as the application of drama therapy in nature, relating to it as a stage for dramatic-creative activity, using physical components as background and material provider, we can regard Nature Therapy as a model for drama therapy as well; a model which expands it and enables it to exist outside of the room, and in nature. We can also see how Nature Therapy offers art therapists additional concepts and models which may aid them when using nature and natural processes in order to advance and to expand the therapeutic process in general and its spiritual dimensions and questions of coping with uncertainty in particular. In the following example I will show how an art-based therapeutic process can combine indoor work and nature-based work.

Example 4: Killing the Monster

Ron, a 7 years old boy, came to therapy after experiencing a traumatic event and ongoing stress caused by war and terror. He suffered from nightmares that interrupted his sleep and was afraid of being without his parents during the day. He also had digestion difficulties and behavioral problems at school. He was a shy boy, using few words. After a few month of EMDR treatment, which reduced the symptoms but did not solve the problems, his EMDR therapist suggested to his parents to combine art-based sessions that would allow Ron to share his story, and work on it in a creative, nonverbal way.

The assessment we did at our first encounter, using the Six Story method based on ideas from the Hero's Journey and the BASICPh approach (Lahad, 2014), brought up the image of a frightening monster that threatens to kill and eat Ron, who does not have the strength to confront it, fight it or chase it away. In the following sessions, we used drawing and sculpting to give shape to Ron's inner strength that could confront the monster and hopefully defeat it. From this work an image of a warrior emerged, a warrior who learned how to fight and kill dragons and monsters. Following Jennings' EPR model (Jennings, 2011), and Lahad's concepts of a healing metaphor (Berger and Lahad, 2013), we dramatized the story and the drawings, connecting Ron to his inner and physical strength, to his creative self and gave him the option to

be active. We also created a mask for the warrior, one that gave Ron special powers.

After 3-4 months Ron began drawing the monster. He began on a small piece of paper using markers and proceeded to bigger pieces of paper using water and gouache paints. During this process a ritual was developed. The first phase was drawing the warrior and then drawing the monster, or putting on the warrior's mask and then drawing the monster. Then in the second phase the warrior jumped on the monster (drawing) and tore it to pieces (killed it). In the third phase Ron collected the remains of the monster and put them in the garbage. This ritual, which took place 3-4 times, helped Ron express his inner felling and reach some kind of catharsis – fighting and killing the monster. Yet, he was still afraid that as the monster had magical powers it would collect itself from the garbage, heal, come back to life and threaten him again.

At this point, I suggested to Ron to go outside, to the nearby Baniyas river. There we conducted a ritual in nature. I suggested he should expand the fighting and killing phase by burning the remains of the monster in a bonfire we made in a circle we created (which was our sacred space), and then throw the monster's ashes in the river. In this way, we would not only make sure it was dead by burning it, but would also be certain its remains were taken far away by the river. This ritual worked like magic. That evening Ron asked his parents if he could go back and sleep in his room. His digestion problems reduced dramatically, as did his fears of being alone during the day. For the first time in a long time, he slept the whole night in his bed. A week later, at our next session, Ron told me that he feels fine and does not need to continue our meetings. We conducted a closing ritual and said goodbye.

Conceptualization

Ron's story is an example of the way Nature Therapy can be integrated into indoor, art-based therapeutic process, helping people to deal with trauma and ongoing stress. It shows how the transition to outdoors opened possibilities and supported the process in ways that could not have been done indoors. In my experience this combination of indoor and outdoor work is quite common, especially with adults who come to my clinic (and do not want nature therapy, preferring indoor work). We use nature in specific cases to promote specific issues and processes. In many cases, we then go back to the clinic and continue the work indoors. In other cases, the clients discover they enjoy being in nature and the experiential work in nature, and ask to continue

the work there. As nature is just outside my clinic, the option of combining Nature Therapy and indoor, art therapy work is available and simple. In the context of this chapter it is important to add that this integration can also be achieved in urban environments, where there are no wild spots. You can work in a nearby park or field, and if those are not accessible, even under a tree in the hospital's yard.

Ron's story is just one example of ways in which this integration can be achieved, using the framework of a story and ritual as a bridge between the two spaces. Another example of similar group work is the 'Safe Place' program which took place in Israel after the Second Lebanon War with more than 12,000 traumatized children (Berger & Lahad, 2010; 2013).

ETHICS

Any therapeutic method or profession must include norms and an ethical code which outlines the therapist's work methods and provides a response to ethical, philosophical and moral questions which s/he may encounter in his/her work in general and in the "grey areas," in particular (Casher, 2003; McLeod, 2003; Shapler, 2006). The professional, ethical code must be related to the professional content of the specific field and deal with its particular issues (Exler, 2007). In general, the objective of the ethical code is to ensure the right level of professionalism and to protect the client from immoral or unethical behavior on the part of the therapist (McLeod, 2003; Peled, 2003; www.yahat.org/ethics.asp). For example, the ethical code of therapists in self-expression and creativity, which was developed by "Yahat", The Israeli Arts Therapists Association, the acronym for the umbrella organization of art therapists, relates to the following four areas when determining the ethical rules of the profession: advancing the emotional welfare of the client; professionalism; integrity; social responsibility.

The code determining ethical standards for relations and mutual work among colleagues, and relationships between the therapist and his/her clients also relates to issues stemming from the particular characteristics of art therapy – creativity, spontaneity, physical self-sacrifice and physical contact which may occur. It does not prohibit these elements but emphasizes the complexities which may be involved, and attempts to raise awareness and draw attention to these complexities.

In most cases, the ethical code is worded and determined by a committee chosen by the umbrella organization of the therapeutic field representing its

members. The field of Nature Therapy is new and has not yet undergone this process. However, as someone who conceptualized and developed Nature Therapy on an academic level, and recognizing the importance of including reference to ethics in a presentation of the therapy, I have chosen to relate to the issue here. I present my approach to the subject in a non-obligatory way and without having been appointed by any organization or group.

The Nature Therapy method is practiced in ways similar to arts therapies, but in contrast to mainstream arts therapies, Nature Therapy takes place in an open, natural setting, a space not owned by the therapist, which has its own value, dynamic and life. This difference heightens the importance of ethical behavior in three main areas.

- A. Therapist-client relations: This is connected to questions of intimacy, physical limits, physical touch and physical-emotional security, elements whose significance is increased during a meeting located in an open space and involving experiential and body work. As these issues are recognized in the realm of expressive and creative arts therapies and holistic therapies, Nature Therapy could adopt the ethical code determined by “Yahat” and add modifications for work in open nature.
- B. Relating to the artistic process and its products: This is connected to questions of control and conservation of the artistic products which may be created during therapy as well as to questions of ownership. For example, the rain, the sea or the stream can wash away and change the work setting, demonstrating the possibility that the artistic product may be destroyed and/or changed, or disappear during the therapy or between one meeting and the next. This raises questions about the client's trust in the therapist. I recommend that, at the beginning of the therapeutic process, the therapist should present the possible effects on the work setting and on the work products of natural events, events that are not controlled by either the therapist or the client. Another element, less common but one that I have encountered, is the question of ownership of the artistic products. For example, in a creative process which was spread over dozens of square meters and included work with barbed wire and trash collected from around the area, in a wood which also served as a grazing area for cattle, at the conclusion of the work a question came up: Who does the artistic installation belong to and could we rope it off just until the next meeting? It was clear to me that the installation was part of the

environment and not roping it off might harm the animals in the area who had been there before us and whose home this was. The client, in contrast, felt that the installation and its setting had become hers and that she wanted to let it be, as it was. This issue was closely connected to questions of control, physical limits and perception of space for the client, and these came up in the therapeutic discussion and advanced it. At the same time, these issues can be related to as philosophical questions linked to perceptions of the relationship between humans and nature, and thus, I raise this example as a possible ethical issue.

- C. Relations with nature: This is specific to the Nature Therapy method and demands separate treatment. It touches on deep philosophical and ecological questions connected to mutual relations between humans and nature and the hierarchy that exists between them. Just as it is unnecessary to cite the (tacit) ethical agreement of art therapists not to steal from the client or to practice sodomy with him/her, it seems to me that it is likewise unnecessary to include basic rules of behavior or the fundamental concern to protect nature in a code of ethics for Nature Therapy. These would include: the obligation to collect garbage at the end of a meeting, the prohibition to pick wildflowers, the prohibition against making a campfire except in places where it is permitted, walking on marked paths, not entering closed reserves and the like. It seems to me that behavior which respects the rules of nature conservation does not have to enter the ethical discourse but is taken for granted as being in line with good practice. But perhaps my point of view is mistaken and these subjects should also be dealt with in the ethical code. In my opinion, an ethical code must touch on the grey areas which are more complex, and go beyond national laws, logic and perceptions of collective morality. An example of a grey area is if, during the therapeutic process, the client asks to break branches off a tree, to mark off a path to the top of a hill or to clear away stones from a rocky area in order to build "a home in nature." Should the therapist allow the client to do these things? Is it moral and ethical? Isn't an activity in which a client actually uses elements of nature for his/her own needs considered exploitation, harming a natural habitat, or damaging the flora and fauna of the natural environment in which s/he is working and which supplies him/her with a hospitable setting for his/her development and work. When a group goes out into the desert and tries to distance itself from a human environment and enters a wild, natural setting, is hiking on unmarked

paths and sleeping outdoors, avoiding an official campsite, ethical? If they light a campfire in places not defined as campfire sites, using the sparse desert vegetation which exists in the area, are those acts unethical? Are they not exploiting and harming nature? They are, and as I have demonstrated above, we can raise these topics in the therapeutic discourse and use them to advance clients' personal and group processes, but in the context of this chapter, I choose to leave them as examples of ethical issues representing some of the ethical complexities which Nature Therapy may evoke, and the need to determine a relevant, specific code of ethics. This code will help Nature Therapy professionals to establish and maintain their professionalism, which will protect the clients from us, and protect us from their legal claims, but also protect nature itself, in which we work and operate (Berger, 2009).

The creation of a code of ethics is a mission for a professional association and not for one person. As a supervisor, I advise readers who wish to work in Nature Therapy or use elements of it, to raise these issues at an early stage of the work with their clients. In this way, expectations will be coordinated, and dealing with the issues will become part of the agreement and of defining the limits in which the therapy will take place.

DISCUSSION AND CLOSER

This chapter presented the theoretical cornerstones and central concepts of the Nature Therapy method, and demonstrated its practical applications with a variety of populations in different constellations, and highlighted unique ethical issues. It showed how these elements can help the therapist not only to enable creative therapy in nature while relating to nature as both a setting and as a stage for his/her work, but also how it can integrate nature into the creative therapeutic process and in this way advance and broaden this process.

Considering the self-healing value of nature, and concepts such as ritual, fantastic reality and distancing, the article discussed the relationship between Nature Therapy and the perception of arts as therapy, as well as the possibility of relating to Nature Therapy as a model in drama therapy, extending them to the realm of nature.

Limitations of space have prevented my dealing with a few concepts such as “choosing the right space” (Berger, 2009) and the concept of “connecting to

universal truths” as well as other ethical issues (see more in Berger, 2009). In addition, models and methods of applied intervention in Nature Therapy (Berger & Lahad, 2011; Berger, 2009) have not been dealt with, nor has a diagnostic model based on the “Building a home in nature” model (Berger, 2008) been presented. Despite the great amount of activity which has taken place in the field of Nature Therapy, the academic recognition it has achieved, the training programs it has held and the many articles and books published, it is important to note that it is still a young and developing discipline and further research is needed for its continued development.

My hope is that more practitioners will incorporate nature into their work and use the encounter for the benefit both of people and of nature.

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