

WAY TO A BETTER SELF, WAY TO A BETTER WORLD

Contemplation of Nature and Naturalness Orientation



The Session Plan

- 8 - 10 minutes of explanation of concept and practice
- 25 - 30 minutes of practice
- 3 - 4 minute of feedback
- 15 - 17 minutes of theoretical basis
- 6 - 7 minutes of film on living traditions
- 6 - 8 minutes of discussion on BCHT
- 5-6 minutes Q&A

Big Concerns

- Fragmentation – thought and action, restricting the flow
- Disconnect with natural environment
Physical, Psychological
- Material wealth is not leading to sustained health and happiness but still consumerism is on the rise

Consumption

- This crisis of consumerism is not about basic needs but is rooted in our changing perception of overall aesthetic sense of beauty and taste. It is reflected in every walk of life from food, clothing and buildings to lifestyle products. This is a new culture almost in complete defiance of the agricultural and biological roots of our cultural traditions. (Sandrisser, 1998)

Connectedness to Nature

- Using a variety of methodologies and measures, researchers have shown that exposure to the natural world decreases negative behaviours and states (e.g., aggression, anxiety, depression, illness) and increases positive ones (e.g., affect, health, cognitive capacity). The big picture is clear: Exposure to nature leads to many desirable outcomes

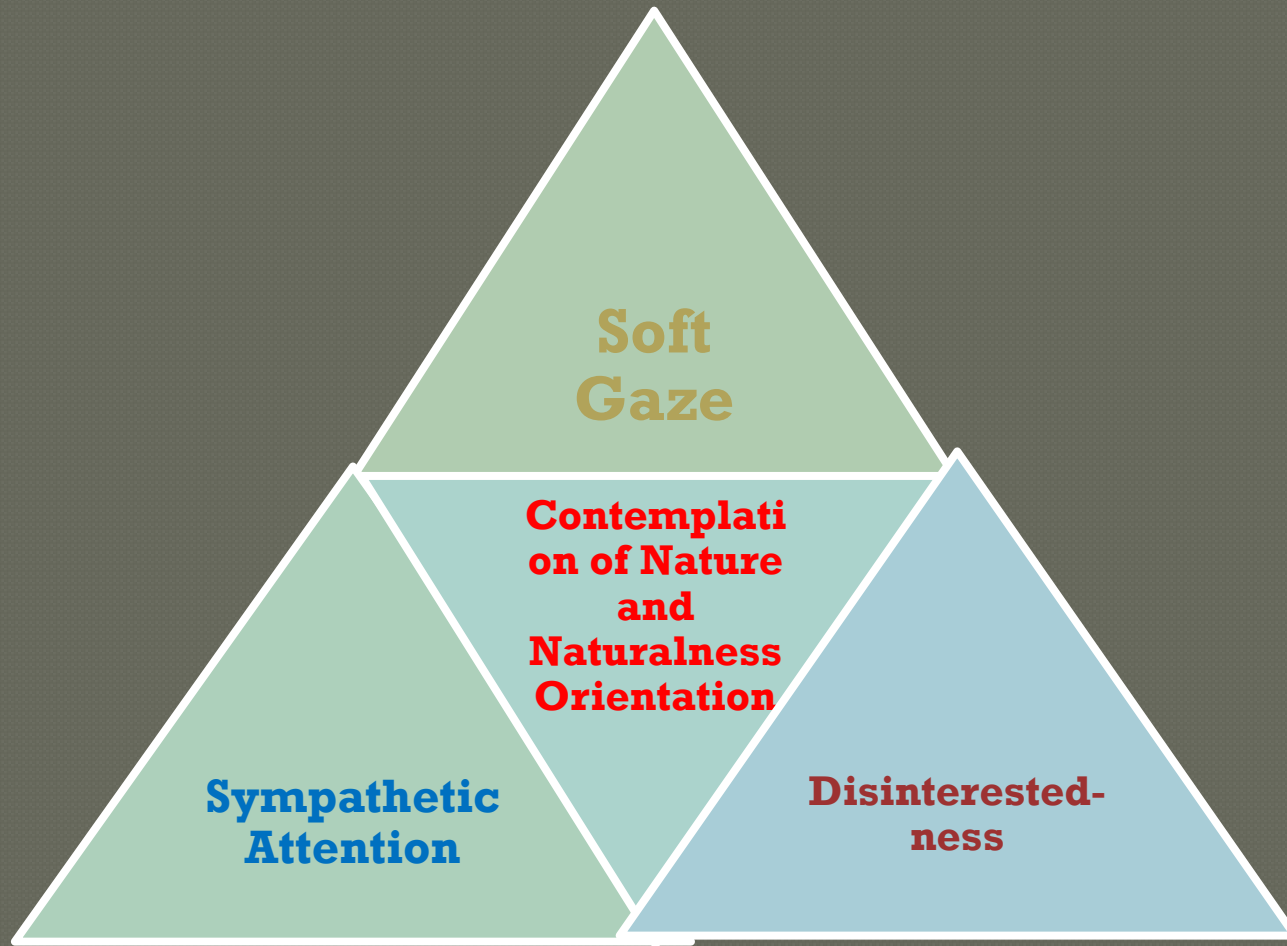
Power of positive emotions

- Interestingly, similar findings from the affect of positive emotions:
- a recent meta-analysis of nearly 300 findings concluded that positive emotions produce success and health. Research indicates that positive emotions contribute to important downstream life outcomes including compassion, care, empathy friendship development and longer lifespan.

Ways we learn

- Cognitive: dominant method – reading, writing, presentations, talks, films etc.
- Experiential : Feel and see; guided or experimental; outdoor nature experience, nature tourism
- Contemplative: being mindfully present : not thinking, interpreting or evaluating. Its an awareness of perception; development of faculties for insight and creativity. Aim at Cultivation of attention and emotional balance .

Method to Contemplate Nature



Soft gaze

- ◉ Choose a view or a natural object
- ◉ Landscape to a potted plant
- ◉ Relaxed and open eyes
- ◉ Blink and close
- ◉ Multi-sensuous engagement
- ◉ Supports although not actively engaging the senses

Human beings and Nature

- We often forget that human beings too are biological organisms
- All biological organisms have a dynamic relationship with their environment
- Human effort has been to design and create more artificial environment, to have more controlled and set pattern in life
- This has increased the physical, mental and emotional distance from the natural environment
- Just like we learn other things, we can relearn how to connect with nature

Disinterestedness

- ◉ distance from the subjects own needs, desires, concerns and outcomes
- ◉ sense of unity of our experience without its subordination to any scientific or moral concepts and purposes
- ◉ Kant – immediate encounter
- ◉ natural world is a perpetual source of aesthetic experience through contemplation even without an active pursuit of knowledge
- ◉ Classically “transcendental”

Sympathetic attention

- as a species whose survival depends on the ability to build mutually beneficial relationships with others, human beings have a deep-seated need to feel connected, to be trusted and loved, and to trust and love in return. A sense of connectedness also increases empathetic responding as well as acts of cooperation, which tend to have mutually reinforcing effects
- Classically - love and kindness meditation
- Reminder of nature's role in survival
- Flourish

Duration of the practice

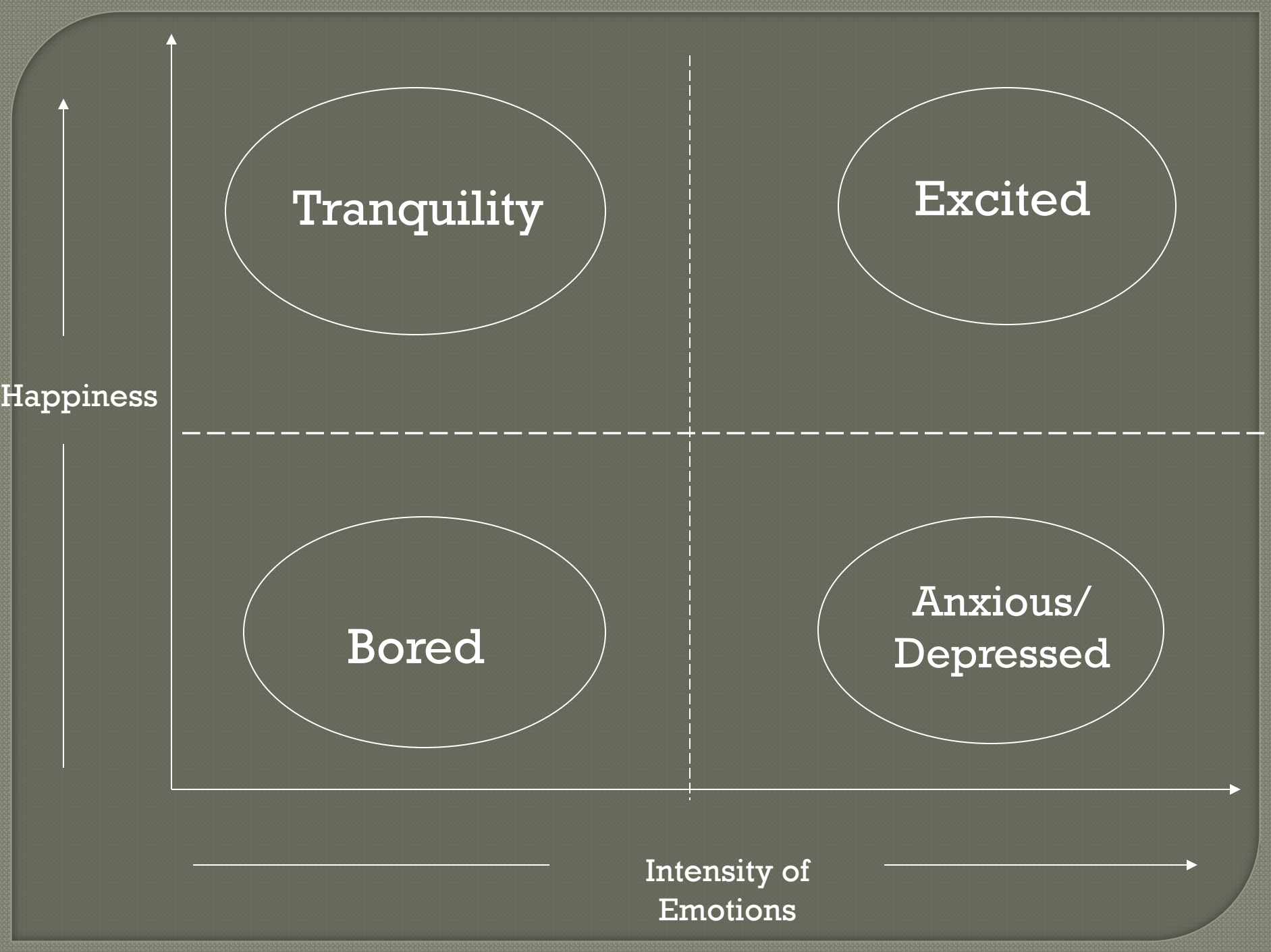
- ◉ MBSR – mindfulness based stress reduction
- ◉ 23 minutes
- ◉ Calm mind – relaxation trigger for physiological functions
- ◉ Recommended duration is 30 minutes
- ◉ Depends 20-40 minutes
- ◉ No dress code, no recitations, no set postures

Practice

- ◉ Settle down comfortably and relax
 - ◉ Soft gaze
 - ◉ Disinterestedness
 - ◉ Sympathetic attention
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- ◉ Bell in the beginning
 - ◉ Second bell at 23rd minute
 - ◉ Third bell at 25th minute
 - ◉ 1-2 minutes to unwind and return to hall

Feedback

- ◉ Calmness
 - ◉ Deep silence
 - ◉ Simplicity
 - ◉ Tranquility
 - ◉ Overwhelmed
-
- ◉ Personal experience
 - ◉ Scientific why and how



Affect of contemplation

- Reduces or eliminates irrelevant thought processes...., thought to lead to physical and mental relaxation, stress reduction, psycho-emotional stability and enhanced concentration. Physiological evidence shows a reduction of stress related autonomic and endocrine measures, while neuro-imaging studies demonstrate the functional up-regulation of brain regions.

Why nature affects us

- Several ways
- Biophilia - humans akin to other species
- - phylogenetic continuity
- Concurs from the field of psychology
- -landscape affinity (natural & social)
- Eastern thought – *Panchmahabhutas* (earth, water, air, space, fire)
- *Shinrin-yoku* - Forest bathing in Japan (making contact with and taking in the forest atmosphere) – profile of mood states
- Innate drive - emotional needs

Cascading effect

- ◉ Deep connect
- ◉ Emotional learning
- ◉ Freedom and Autonomy
- ◉ Naturalness Orientationities
- ◉ Exposure to natural environment decreases negative behaviours and states – aggression, anxiety, depression, illness
- ◉ Increases positive ones – affect, health and cognitive capacity
- ◉ State of mind affects the state of body





Deep connect

- What is constructed or reconstructed in these intimate moments of contemplative absorption when self becomes other than just itself? Feelings for others and understanding of them may be altered; new registers of feeling and fresh angles of understanding may contribute to an 'expansion' of self and self-meaning; new vocabularies of experience may be acquired and old ones extended, and there may be a special pleasure qualifying the time during which it happens

Emotional learning

- without conscious perception, emotion discrimination is possible
- perceptual systems and the emotional systems in the brain are two separate systems in parallel
- one can give rise to unconsciously processed emotional bodily responses,
- second to conscious perceptions (including cognition)
- These neuro-scientific findings explain emotional responses and even emotional learning without conscious cognition

Emotions and beliefs

- ◉ emotional feelings are directly experienced, and arise from within, the personal validity of information they appear to convey seems self-evident to the person experiencing them
- ◉ conscious thinking could prove an impediment in achieving a deep soothing state
- ◉ deeply influences our awareness and enhances sensitivity

Freedom and autonomy

- release of anxiety and frustrations that may have been uncons pulling us down, yield freedom and contentment
- freedom and contentment are the key ingredients for autonomous decision making
- autonomy is all about being able to do what one believes in

Naturalness Orientation

- Naturalness can be explained by the contrast between what a person wants simply in virtue of being the kind of organism s/he is – and what this or that person learns to want by being luxurious, fanciful or fashionable. The latter describes people whose wants have been conditioned to a greater extent by the influence of the society. The former, who is considered more natural, retains a greater degree of autonomy from the influence of the society

Environment and Behaviour

- Increasing evidence of violence, rudeness, self centeredness, apathy, unhealthy competition, drugs, psychosomatic diseases, lifestyle disorders are visible even in that class which is educated, has material comforts and access to modern amenities
- Exposure to natural environment decreases negative behaviours and states – aggression, anxiety, depression, illness
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The Foundation

- Objectives:
 - 1. To create and encourage among all people a direct personal experience of Nature;
 - 2. To posit a communion with Nature as a means of enhancing human well being in all its facets;
 - 3. To help elevate the conservation of Nature to a level at par with other societal concerns such as the elimination of poverty, hunger, drugs and social corruption;
 - 4. To promote Contemplation of Nature practice in all its diversity to enhance mindfulness; inner motivation and transformation of individuals as effective change leaders.



- ◉ Pathways to Sustainable Development
- ◉ Thanks to IIED and ICIMOD
- ◉ Organisers of the WPC and theme 3
- ◉ All participants

Greening of the self

- ◉ When you look at what is happening to our world.... it becomes clear that unless you have some roots in the spiritual practice that holds life sacred and encourages joyful communion....facing the enormous challenges ahead becomes nearly impossible

- Joanna Macy

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- multi tasking is dividing into little bits of pieces, narrow down things which gives a feeling of being 'fragmented'

Lessons from traditional lifestyles

- The bio-cultural heritage evolves with connectedness to landscape
- The knowledge and wisdom emanates with deep and mindful living
- Rich cultural traditions evolve and flourish with a perspective of holism
- Diverse traditions are often rooted in universal humane principals
- The contemplative traditions need to be revived
- A feedback loop with scientific research

Future collaboration

- ◉ Flow of experience
- ◉ Made of the same elements
- ◉ Reverence of Nature and cosmologic vision

Acknowledgements

- ◉ SIFOR, IIED
- ◉ ISE
- ◉ UWICE
- ◉ GNH

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subtle magnetism in
Nature, which, if we
unconsciously yield to it,
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~Henry David Thoreau

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