

Sit Spot

From my experience of sharing with people around the world, Sit Spot is a global practice. There is something primal about sitting quietly in one place, attentive to the immediate surrounds, awakening to all our senses in stillness. We watch, listen, feel, smell, and learn from nature. Sometimes we get bored, then fascination helps us drift away with experience, then we catch ourselves daydreaming, then we return to the moment ... it is mediation outdoors, but with deep listening to the song of the earth, the more-than-human voices all around us. If you haven't practised Sit Spot before, be prepared for something simple yet powerful, which will subtly shift your senses and help you know you belong right where you are. If you have, you'll already know there is no end to this practice – we could keep doing it until the day we die and never stop learning from the little things and the big picture that comes with them.

Most practitioners have a few similar rules of engagement:

- It is good to return to the same place as often as possible. This is not a hard and fast rule, in terms of exact spot – I have many little nooks and crannies along the stretch of coastal beach where I live, rather than just one – but sticking to one specific place for as long as possible (especially at first) will yield specific results in terms of your relationship with the nature right there.
- It is good to try different times of day, as places change throughout the day and night, but it is also good to experience a spot at the same time each day to see what else changes there.
- Similarly with seasons; watching things change as days get longer or shorter, leaves grow or fall, animals habits shift throughout the year ... longer term practice adds more and more layers to your knowledge of a place and your growing comfort there.

I have a few ways I like to guide people to find their Sit Spot and get the most out of this experience:

- Begin with a mindfulness walk. Don't rush or even 'try' to find your spot. Wander, giving your full attention to your senses, letting thoughts go, return to your body in the moment. Feel the land, follow your intuition, allow yourself to be drawn to a place. It doesn't have to be pleasant or remarkable; just attractive to you in some way. Your wiser self will settle somewhere appropriate.
- Ask permission to settle there. This doesn't have to be very formal, and you don't have to believe the Genius Loci, or Spirit of Place, is aware of you and will respond. It's just a matter of manners, of decentring the human sense of entitlement, of being open to the rights of more-than-human nature.
- You may wish to follow your request with a greeting to your Sit Spot. It is also good to guarantee you have no bad intention, as well as asking for protection while there.
- This will be one of the few times I insist on this – don't take your journal. Don't record your thoughts while there. Practice awareness and the retention of experiences; log the patterns of your awareness and distractions internally, where you can also work on them. Gives this time to the experience and to your attention as it expands and reduces to include more of nature.
- Watch your mind as well as your surrounds. Does the mind wander? Can we settle into an awakened mode of contemplation that remains true to this place and

time? Don't beat yourself up if you can't. Practice and let go of expectations. Allow yourself to be enchanted by changes, details, subtleties, senses.

Practical considerations

- Distance and other people: we may be too close to others. Create whatever space for yourself you can.
- Traffic and human noise: forgive the cars, they are nature too. Same with chainsaws. Not great but nothing you can do about the suburban fascination with power tools and the neverending hubbub of human society. Let it be part of the song as it is being sung around you; it will make the magpies, kookaburras and others seem so much sweeter when it's their turn.

Meditative prompts you may wish to ask yourself in your Sit Spot

- Which element of nature is talking right now and what does it say?
- What more than rational feel can you enjoy with your spot?
- What sense of relationship do you build up with that place? Can it compare to any other relationship you have known in any way?
- Can your spot help you overcome fear of the unknown, anxiety about aloneness or being non-productive?

The Sit Spot exercise can culminate with sharing and participants can also make an artwork, compose music, video something or journal their experience to celebrate it (after the sitting time). If they like, people can show the others their sit spot, and tell how it helped them to answer their questions. See again the upload section in the training page for more details and instructions on this.

Please remember, the sit spot is about awareness and deep listening, as well as peripheral sensing, of your spot in or facing nature. You don't necessarily have to sit, if that won't work (eg on very wet ground), but you should practice:

- returning to the same spot at different times of the day and year;
- deep listening for the voice or song of the earth;
- small things, concrete details, plant and animal life, elemental constituents, the qualities of things like wind, wave, soil, more-than-human life;
- allow (and enjoy) 'big picture' and indeed any other thought processes that arise, but ask monkey or machine mind if mundane human concerns (societal expectations, everyday duties etc) can be 'parked' for another time; and
- not journalling while there (the reflection or art comes afterwards please).

For the purposes of the Advanced Ecotherapy Training Course, you have the opportunity to record something of your experience and get feedback on your practice. This can be good for you and your own deepening nature connection, as well as providing you with something of a model for the way you lead others in turn. (See the upload section in the training page for more details and instructions on this.)

Oh, and one little warning – sometimes it is best not to push through our comfort barriers and tough it out. I've seen bad experiences with ticks, times when it is so wet it just becomes miserable, and one winter I sat for too long in the cold and damaged a knee. It is good to stretch ourselves, but not to be broken.