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Finding Sanctuary: Getting Clear in the Midst of Illness, Crisis or Change

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**Clearing A Space: A Practice for Increasing Well-Being
(with special applications for Illness and Trauma).**

Joan Klagsbrun, Ph.D.



What is Clearing a Space?

- **A method for finding inner sanctuary, a place of safety where we can rediscover our strength, resilience, and perspective.**

Describe Clearing a Space

“It's slowing down your surface thoughts so you can really see and hear what's going on...like sitting really still in a forest and hearing all the sounds.”



Goals of this presentation

- **Understand what Clearing a Space is.**
- **Learn how Clearing a Space was created, and how it has been empirically validated on different populations.**
- **Practice the Clearing a Space method.**
- **Come away with applications of this method for use with your patients.**

Two Prerequisites for Clearing a Space

- **To have a friendly attitude towards yourself.**

- **To take a moment to find how the body holds each issue.**

How to Clear a Space:

- Sense what your body is carrying right now.
- Put down each stress-producing concern one at a time.
- Place the concerns at the right “distance” away.
- After placing each concern out, check inside.

How to Clear a Space: (continued)

- Find a background sense and place that aside.
- Dwell in the cleared space.
- Find words or images that capture the *feel* of the 'cleared space'.
- Discover if there is a 'life-forward step' that comes from the cleared space.

Clearing a Space allows us to:

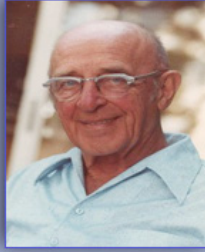
- **Assume that well-being is our natural state.**
- **Remember that we are not our or problems, concerns, thoughts, or feelings.**
- **Discover a sense of aliveness and calmness that lies beneath our current challenges.**



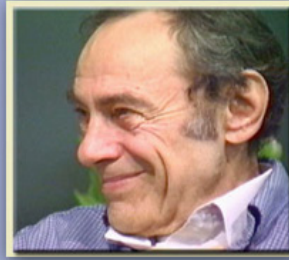


Philosopher Eugene Gendlin

Trunk collage animation goes here AFTER text on screen 6.



Carl Rogers



Gene Gendlin

Q: What makes psychotherapy successful?

Type of psychotherapy?

Topics discussed?

Skill of the therapist?

**How clients relate to
their inner experience?**

One line, then gone. Leave on last line.

A murky, unclear, vague “felt sense,”
over time and with inner attention,
comes into clearer focus.

(then fade out this text,
Then ...



Change to landscape imagery.



(a picture out of focus that comes into focus...then fade in to the next slide with
Title “Focusing”



(a picture out of focus that comes into focus...then fade in to the next slide with
Title “Focusing”



(a picture out of focus that comes into focus...then fade in to the next slide with
Title “Focusing”



“Focusing” goes on bottom after pict gets focused.

Movements in Focusing

Clear a Space

- Choose something to Focus on.
- Invite a “felt sense”.
- Find a “handle”.
- Resonate.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Accept what comes.

History of Clearing a Space

During the 1970s and 80's practitioners used **Clearing a Space** as a free-standing, rapid stress-management tool with varied populations: from suicidal patients to children in schools.

Case Study: Clearing a Space in Psychotherapy

- Jodi, 35 year old counselor and mother of two small children
- Metastatic breast cancer



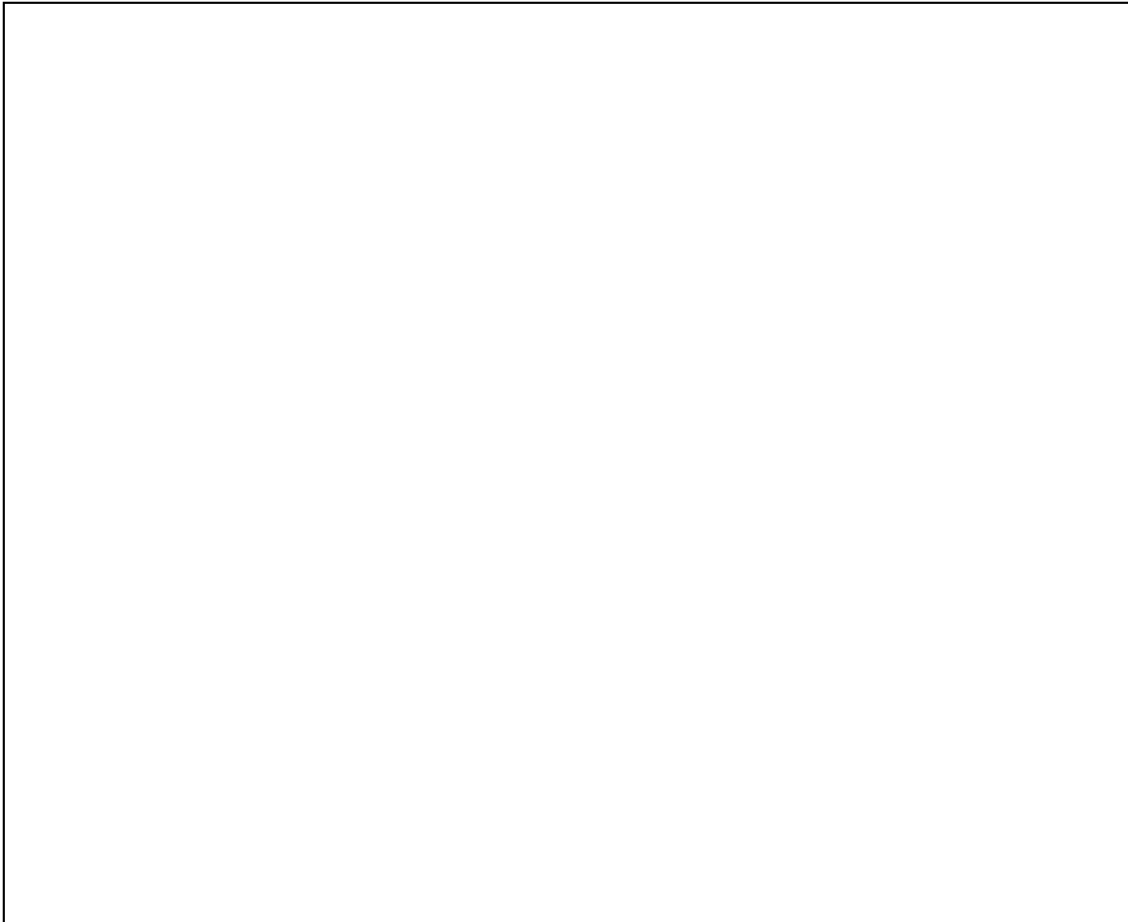
Jodi's 'Clearing a Space' Experience

- Drilling sensation of Bone pain
- Tightness in chest
fear children would not be raised as Christians
- Heaviness in heart that son would not remember her
- Pain in abdomen that daughter would not remember her as happy



Case Study: Karen

- 42 year old lawyer
- Herniated disc/lower back pain



Karen's "Clearing a Space" Experience

- Brick in her chest / Disappointed
- Sensation in her belly / vulnerable
- Anger at her mother-in-law
- Whole body sensation of tightness / Fear



"God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot
change, courage to change the things we can,
and wisdom to know the difference."

Serenity Prayer



Karen used Clearing a Space to:

- **Name and distance herself from painful feelings that accompanied the back pain.**
- **Find an inner state where she experienced comfort and well-being.**



Studies on 'Clearing a Space' for people with cancer

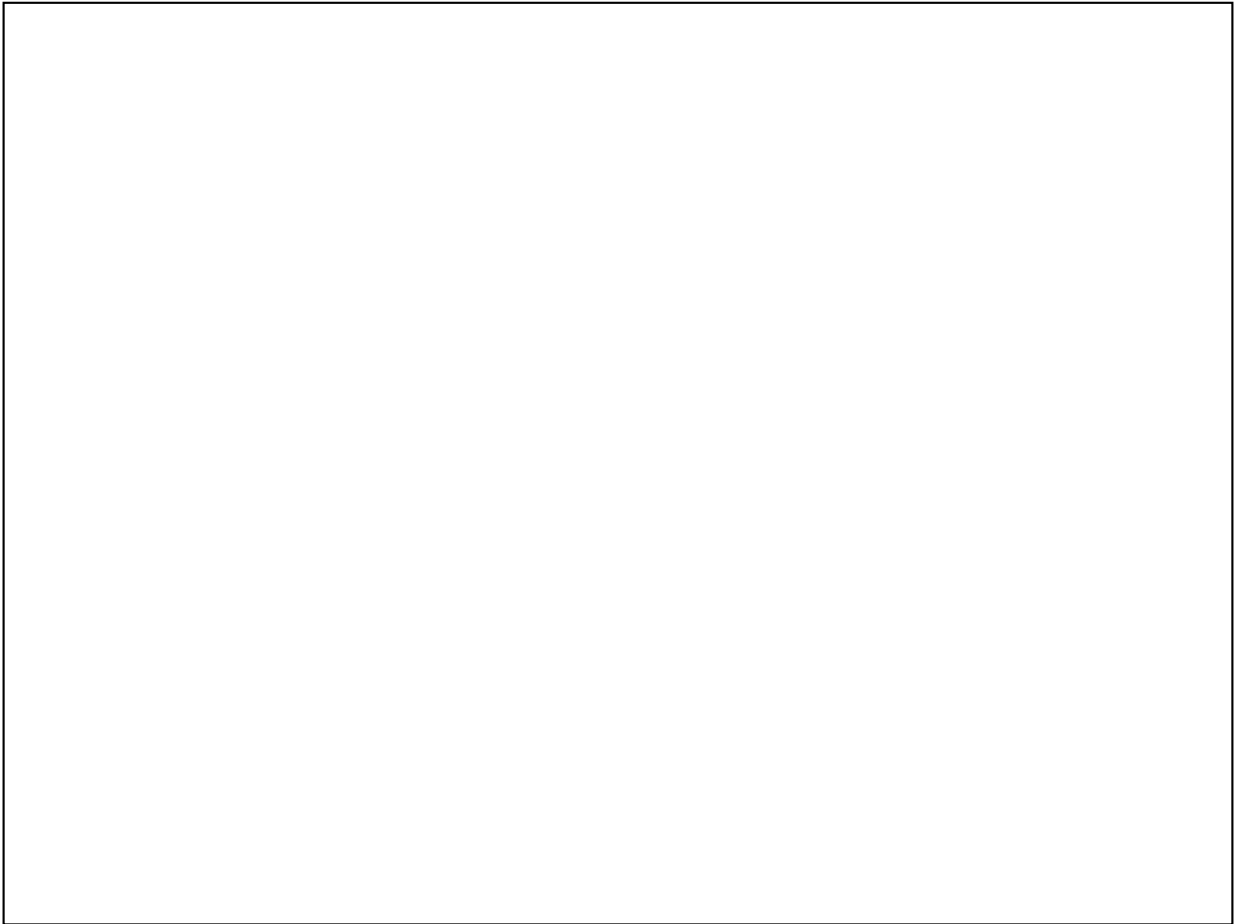
- **Focusing: A
Psychological Tool for
Adaptive Recovery**
(Grindler, 1982.)

*Better mood, better body
image, less depression.*

- **Focusing and Expressive
Arts Therapy as a
Complementary Treatment
for Women with Breast
Cancer** (Klagsbrun et. al, 2005 and
2007.)

*Increase in physical, social
and emotional well-being.*











The “Cleared Space” of Women with Breast Cancer

- “I imagine an elastic band stretching, kind of like a clothesline, and all my problems were put out by hand, to dry. My clear space is bright and calm.”

- “Oh my, this is how I felt before I got sick. I didn’t think I could feel that way again.”

- “I was just noticing all that is there and then the thought came...put it in God’s hands. But it wasn’t really just a thought...I could really imagine placing it outside of me...in the center of a flower...(begins to cry)...Oh, my God...I feel such relief...just in letting go like this...”

The “Cleared Space” of Women with Breast Cancer (continued)

“What I find there is bits of hope, multiple bits of hope. But this is real stuff - these speckles of hope are actually very promising.”

“The cleared space is kind of relaxed, light, soft and fluffy, very comfortable. I didn’t even know I had that place in me; now I can come back to it.”

Common Psychosocial Complaints of Cancer Patients

- Fear, anxiety, depression
- Insomnia
- Social disruption
- Stress of receiving care
- Somatic concerns
- Stress of making life changes

Hypotheses of 'Clearing a Space' Study

- 'Clearing a Space' is an effective method for decreasing stress and enhancing well-being.
- The telephone is an effective delivery method for 'Clearing a Space'.

Recruiting Participants for Study

- Are you feeling emotionally overwhelmed?**

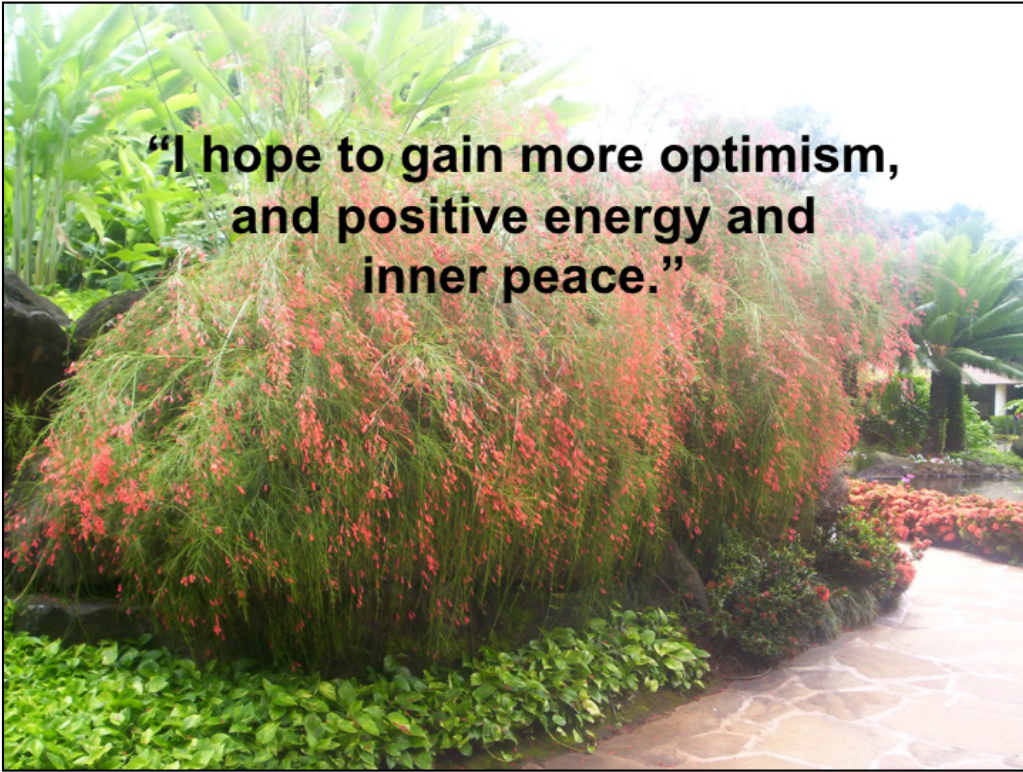
- Would you like to find more peace in your everyday life?**

- Would you like to treat yourself with more compassion?**

“Stress may have played a role in my cancer. I’m hoping to gain a new way to cope.”







Study Measures

- **Clearing a Space Checklist-** (Grindler 1991) - measures the degree to which a person places aside obstacles to well-being
- **Grindler Body Attitudes Scale** - rates the degree to which a person maintains a positive attitude towards her body
- **FACT-B Scale (Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy)** - rates physical, social, emotional, and functional well-being.
- **BSI 18** -assesses psychological distress in general population
- **Inventory of Positive Psychological Attitudes(IPPA)-32R** (Kass, 1998)

It is a 32- item, 7-point, self-report scale of life satisfaction, personally-created meaning in life, purpose in life itself, and self-confidence during potentially stressful situations (perceptions of being in control and that things are under control).

Participants

Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI)
Grindler Body Attitudes Scale
FACT-B, Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy (Breast Cancer)
Inventory of Attitudes 32-R
Demographics Intake Form Guides
Clearing A Space Checklist
Notes versus audiotapes
Website and online group
Closing interview

BSI = anxiety, depression, psychological distress, intensity of symptoms

Grindler = Body attitudes especially around cancer

FACT-B = Physical, social, emotional

Inventory: Life purpose and satisfaction and improvement in physical health

“Before & After” Clearing a Space Study

Session	Start of Session	End of Session
1	Disconnected, scattered, annoyed; Annoyed at husband (maybe he is feeling neglected)	Clearer and calmer feeling Need to be still & look at what is really important
2	Upset about the death of a woman in my cancer support group Fear in the pit of my stomach Anxiety about various day-to-day issues	Feel calmer having expressed anxieties and fears Feel relaxed and peaceful Unloading problems makes me feel like dancing
1		
2		

“Before & After” Clearing a Space Study (continued)

3	Tightness in back about a friend with ovarian cancer who is now going to hospice	<p>Feel clearer, peaceful, would be good to have more of this</p> <p>Forward step is to be strong, protect self and separate from friends who are dying</p>
4	<p>Concerned about 31 year old son-feel anxious about his living at home</p> <p>Problem is multifaceted like dancing on eggshells</p>	<p>Able to set concern about son on bench</p> <p>Cleared space is image of being by a lake with snow capped mountains</p> <p>Feeling more grounded, more centered, closer to God</p>
3		
4		



Client's Experience of the 'Cleared Space'

"It's like coming home to myself...after being away for a long time.. I can rest there with all of me. I didn't know that there is this inner home, that is the essence of me...and is free of my problems."

Quantitative Results

- **Two of four measures had statistically significant positive results.**
- **No statistical differences were found between in-person and telephone sessions.**

Our results were disappointing in that only one of our four measures showed significance pre to post. We think this is due to the small sample size and the fact that some of the measures did not capture the nature of the changes that were experienced. We are guessing that a shift in attitude towards one's body might take.

We feel encouraged by the finding that telephone and in person sessions (at least after one initial meeting was equally effective. To be able to deliver an effective stress reducing, well being enhancing intervention on the telephone makes it easier to deliver for health care providers and especially for clients for whom travelling to an appointment can be challenging.

Overall Clearing a Space results (Susan analysis of raw Clearing a Space score

--Add slide w/ the 6 Qs from the subtest

Questions on the Functional Well- Being Sub test included :*"I am able to work"*; *"My work is fulfilling"*; *"I am able to enjoy life;"* *"I have accepted my illness"*; *"I am sleeping well;"* *"I am enjoying things I usually do for fun"*; *"I am content with the quality of my life right now"* These comparisons did not reach significance perhaps due to the small sample size. In the experimental group, the expected positive correlation between Clearing a Space scores and measures did not reach significance . Interestingly, the most striking differences in the quantitative measures were comparing the control group before and after they received the Clearing a Space intervention. These participants, who waited 6 weeks to get the Clearing a Space intervention, had significant results on two tests: The Fact B Total and the Grindler Body Attitude Scale. This group also did show the expected positive correlation with the Clearing a Space scores and their measures.No statistical differences were found between the telephone and in person sessions showing that, the two kinds of sessions were equally effective,

Fact B Subtest Questions

The Fact B Functional Subtest
($p=0.05$)

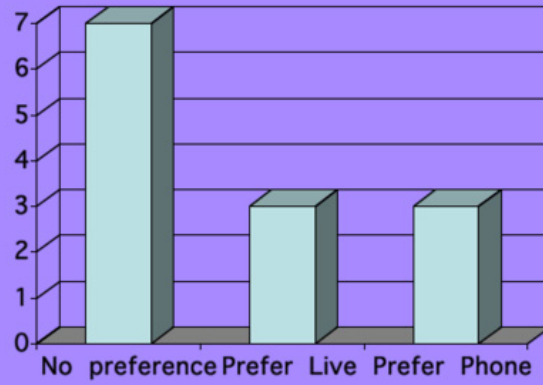
- **Questions in that subtest:**
 - *“I am able to work”*
 - *“My work is fulfilling”*
 - *“I am able to enjoy life”*
 - *“I have accepted my illness”*
 - *“I am sleeping well”*
 - *“I am enjoying things I usually do for fun”*
 - *“I am content with the quality of my life right now”*

Address telephone is effective
(see exit interviews on telephone)

Measures not the best choice—not capturing major changes

Powerful tool for stress reduction—perhaps other measures would fit better

Telephone vs. Live



Qualitative Findings: Value of Clearing a Space

- More calm and peaceful
- Greater awareness and insight
- Reduced somatic worries
- Enhanced mental clarity
- Improved emotional self-regulation
- Increased empowerment



Reduced Somatic Concerns

**“All sorts of body concerns and worries
come up and I can feel overwhelmed.
Having this method [focusing] helps
work with these feelings.”**

Have each line come in separately.

Mental Clarity & Focus

“It made me feel focused and more confident.”

“I had a clear mind at the end of the week.”



Emotional Self-Regulation

“It’s a port in a storm, a way to move away from the chaos coming at you.”





Would Clearing a Space be of Benefit to Cancer Patients?

100% said yes

“If done during treatment it could help a lot. It would take the fears away.”

“ People get scared and anxious. It would help put their fears aside and deal with them when they're in a better and calmer place.”

“It would help right after diagnosis, when you have a lot of treatments and appointments. That time feels overwhelming! It would be useful to Clear a Space.”

100% said they feel Clearing a Space would benefit others with breast cancer.

Clearing a Space for Trauma Recovery

(Anita Bhat, 2008)

Trauma recovery requires:

- **Safe emotional distance from past trauma** (van der Kolk, 1996)
- **Patient-controlled pacing** (van der Kolk, 1996; Herman, 1992)
- **Establishing a sense of safety in one's body** (van der Kolk & Herman)
- **Creation of new personal meaning of past trauma** (van der Kolk, 1996)

Clearing a Space effectively addresses all of these components.

How Does Clearing a Space Benefit Women with PTSD and Addiction?

- Helps gain the optimal emotional distance from trauma.
- Helps find a safe middle ground (*an inner place of peace or safety*) between emotional flooding (*hyper-arousal*) and emotional numbing (*avoidance*).

Clearing a Space Study with PTSD and Substance Abuse Patients

(Bhat, 2008) hypothesized that six weeks of Clearing a Space would reduce trauma symptoms, as measured by the Trauma Symptom Inventory (TSI).

Clearing a Space Case Study

Ms. A is a 49 year-old substance abuser who is divorced and currently unemployed.

She suffered the traumatic loss of her 17 year-old son by a gang shooting.

During the study, Ms. A. lost her job which was the only thing in her life that gave her a sense of self-worth.

She has Major Depressive Disorder and is currently in outpatient substance abuse treatment.

, in a gang-related drive-by murder. Depression and trauma symptoms have existed since the murder.

She also learned that she would lose her housing at her sobriety home, and would have only one month to find shelter or else live on the streets as a homeless woman. Since she had no money or job, these crises aggravated her depression.

Ms. A's Experience of Clearing a Space

It has me able to see more of an insight on life itself.....helping me to deal with life on life's terms.. you know. I had **something that was embedded deep inside of me that was troubling me** and not letting me deal with what was going on because I was still stuck....but with this study, **I was able to release that hold**.....it was like having a baby (laughs heartily) Oh my God, that labor part.. **but once the baby is here, every pain that you felt has been released!**

Trauma symptom changes

Diminishment of:

- Traumatic memories
- Traumatic images
- Physiological reactivity
- Distressing Dreams
- Hallucinations

Increased interest in life activities

Note notes notes.



**"I'm sorry, I didn't hear what you said.
I was listening to my body."**





Path

Clearing a Space Protocol

- ❖ Place your attention in the center of your body. Take a few deep breaths, inviting your body to relax.
- ❖ Remember a time or place in which you felt wonderful or at peace.
- ❖ Ask yourself what's between that good feeling and how you are right now. If you are feeling good now - just stay with that positive feeling.
- ❖ If there is a discrepancy between a past experience of feeling good and how you are right now - sense into that "not good feeling" (without falling into it) and see what is contributing to it.
- ❖ After these concerns (usually 3-5 of them) are placed out of the body, you might place your "background" feelings down as well.

Clearing a Space Protocol (cont)

❖ When you've put down your current concerns (i.e., the ones you can actually feel in your body right now) and you've put down the "background feeling", notice if there is a greater sense of well-being.

❖ Now - take a few moments vacation from all your problems and concerns. Notice that there can be a "cleared space" in you in which you are safely distanced from your concerns and worries.

❖ As your attention rests in the "cleared" or "all fine" place, see if there is a word, image, phrase, gesture, or sound that matches it.. Take a moment to appreciate what comes.

❖ Finally, as you stay with that experience, see if it would be right to ask yourself "How can I have more of this in my life?" When you are ready, slowly and gently bring yourself back into the room.

Four uses of Clearing a Space

- For stress reduction and self-care.
- At the start of a session of psychotherapy or bodywork
- When beginning a support group, meeting or class
- Before other contemplative activities such as Focusing, meditation, art, or prayer

Variations on Clearing a Space

- Clearing a Space 'backwards' "Is there anything between you and feeling utterly bleak?"
- Clearing a Space referencing a spiritual quality " What is between you and feeling compassion, or equanimity or faith or peacefulness?"
- Clearing a Space with art " What images, colors or textures capture each issue and can you draw the cleared space?"

Benefits of Clearing a Space

Brings us into the present moment.

Invites us to treat ourselves with gentleness and curiosity.

Helps release bodily stress and tension.

Connects us to concerns without being overwhelmed.

Offers distance from pressing issues.

Have each line come in separately.

Benefits of Clearing a Space (cont)

Encourages a wider perspective--we are not our problems.

Opens to our spirituality.

Offers a direction for forward living.

Provides a relational process.

Have each line come in separately.

Four Life -Enhancing Skills Clients Learn

- **How to reduce stress-- with a method they can use on their own**
- **How to symbolize what is implicitly felt**
- **How to find distance from pressing issues**
- **How to find their “clear” or “all fine” space, no matter what the circumstances**



Title with Rumi and guest house photo - old and pretty

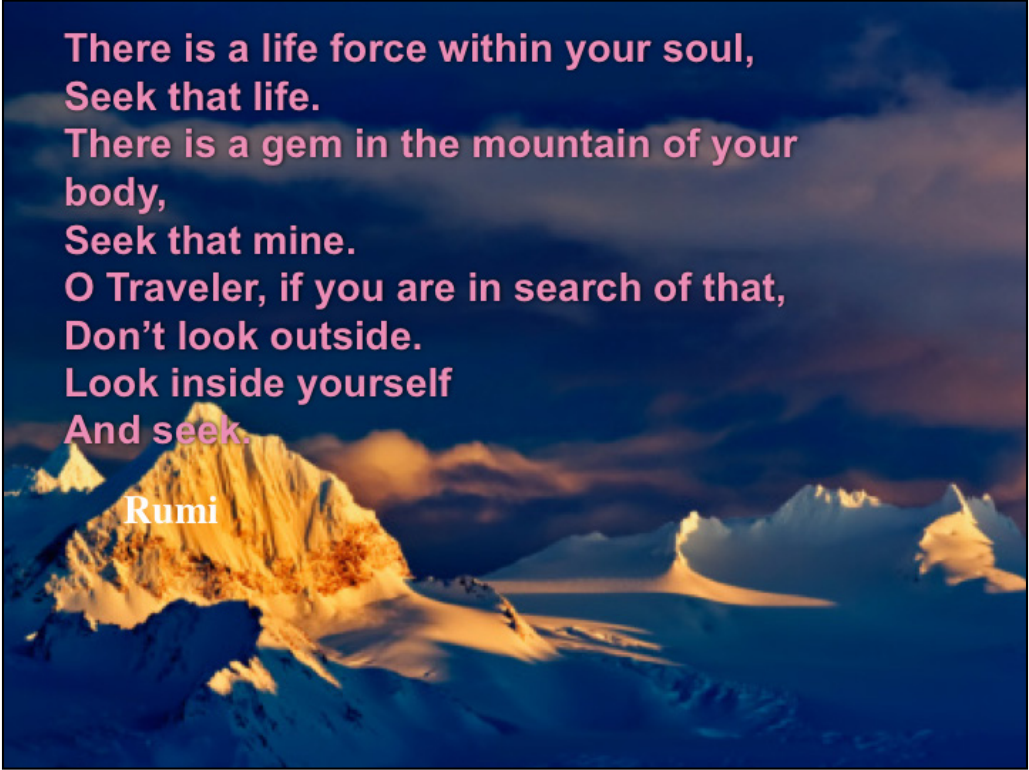
This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they´re a crowd of sorrows,
Who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.



**There is a life force within your soul,
Seek that life.
There is a gem in the mountain of your
body,
Seek that mine.
O Traveler, if you are in search of that,
Don't look outside.
Look inside yourself
And seek.**

Rumi

Look for mountain with a gem and make text pop out.



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How Clearing A Space Differs from Relaxation and Meditation

In **Clearing a Space** we:

- **Connect to a body sense of each stressor**
- **Identify and separate each stressor**
- **Direct attention fully to a concern or problem instead of giving bare attention to a stressor,**
- **Attend to the felt sense level of experience**
- **Utilize imagery**
- **Is relational (we work with a partner or therapist)**