

My biotope

The word 'biotope' literally means an area where life lives. We know that plants and animals have their own biotope or natural habitat, and so do human beings. Most of us have developed skills and attitudes that permit us to create a living place in all kinds of environmental conditions. However, there is a specific optimal biotope where I, as this unique person, can best grow and flourish.

This biotope-experiential exercise¹ guides you step by step in a process that helps you to deepen your connection with the essence of who you are - by finding out which environment you need to achieve your full potential – using a metaphor in nature.

You can either do this practice session in a focusing partnership or on your own by writing.

Part I

- Attunement. Clearing a space.
- Invite **a sense of how you are in your life**. Notice how it basically feels to be you, and how it is carried in your body.
- Is there **a plant or an animal** (or whatever metaphor in nature feels right for you) that would be **a good metaphor** for this sense of how you truly experience yourself in life?
- Allow yourself to be surprised... welcome what is coming, whatever it is, and check if the metaphor that comes fits with how you really sense yourself. Check if it is the best metaphor for who you are, truly as you are, and not who you would like to be or think you should be... and also acknowledge if something in you that is protesting or is critical about what comes...
- Once you have found your metaphor, take some time to **let it resonate** in you and connect with the sense of being that animal or this plant.

There are several things you can do here:

- ✓ You can visualise your metaphor while you notice your body's response to it.
- ✓ Sometimes a (little) movement or a gesture can help you to sense more clearly in your body. You can leave your chair if that feels ok.
- ✓ You can also connect to your metaphor by drawing or painting.

When you really go into the process, you will see that the metaphor gets more precise (for instance, it is not just a monkey, but it's a gorilla; it is not just a tree but it's a willow, or even more precisely, it's a weeping willow...).

¹ The biotope-experiential exercise was developed by Chris Van de Veire for the online course 'Counselling and coaching in Existential Wellbeing', directed by Mia Leijssen, University of Leuven. Besides existential theories and Positive Psychology models for counselling and coaching, an important part of the course consists of experiential exercises aiming at encouraging personal development. The biotope-exercise is a part of the last section: 'Treasures for life quality'. The learning objectives for this section are: being in touch with personal sources of life quality, and developing virtues and strengths to improve well-being.

Part II

- You stay with the metaphor, and you seek to extend it by bringing in **everything you know about how this animal or this plant lives in its environment** (free association).
- Explore the natural habitat of this living being. The language suggests that *'habitat' is where we live our 'habits'*. Focus on the interaction with the natural environment, how the animal or the plant lives in its biotope.

It is important here that you focus on the 'natural' habitat (don't put your animal in a cage or your plant in a pot on the terrace).

- Don't bother too much about where the knowledge comes from, or if what you think you know is scientifically correct. Just wonder how your animal or plant lives in its environment, how it is in interaction with its natural habitat, and something will come... the main intention is that you engage in a Focusing process, that you listen inside, that you are zigzagging between the symbolisation and your felt sense. Be curious, don't limit yourself to what is already explicit. After you have made something explicit, go back to the felt sense of that, and what unfolds from there. You can search on the internet for more information, photos or illustrations to inspire you.

Part III

- Which of the **components/characteristics** of the environment feel the most important for you? Where do you feel a connection, and where you can feel it resonate in you?
- If you imagine these qualities in your environment, **how would that affect you?**
- Is there something you learned about **what you need in your environment**, in order to be able to grow or flourish more?
- Is there something you learned in all this that you could receive as an **invitation to change** something in your life, so that your environment is a better biotope for you?
- Was there something that came as a surprise, or as an inspiration?
- Before you close, take an extra minute **to receive** what this exercise brought you. Ask yourself how you want to take it with you, so that it can continue to develop after this session.

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