Meditation on Grief – Reflections by Hazel

This reflection and meditation can be done without the Youtube video (recommend the use of Youtube if you can). For those who struggle with hearing, the text below can also be used to support the video. Our Youtube presentation is an invitation to spiritually join regular meditators at Wisdom Centre (presently isolated and meditating in their own homes). The tradition we meditate in is Centering Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

The text is on the screen with narration. Music and a count down timer are part of the presentation. For technical reasons, the reflection has some disruption to the sound quality. To overcome this, a transcript is below.

Begins with usual opening prayers and introductions (Audio Visual or follow using text below)

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition with Fi Jenvey (narrator).

Opening Prayer: Through Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, by whose breath our souls are raised to life. We, in meditation in this time of crisis pray with all others, as one community and one world to One God, we unite with our brothers and sisters of all world traditions

With God are Wisdom and understanding. May our ears be attentive, may the meditation of our hearts be for understanding. Through Christ, may we seek and find you, acting only according to Your will. May we follow His teaching, also seeking, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we commit to love of earth, faithfulness, community, stability, peace and justice making.

Letting go of all else, in contemplation we surrender in love to you. Let our sacred word be a symbol of our consent to your loving presence and healing. May we be faithful to this word so that it rises in our hearts, awakening that sense of Your presence. **Amen**

Reflections on Grief

[1.] **Introduction**: As we enter the fourth month of restrictions due to the covid-19 crisis, we have all experienced so much change in our lives, both externally and internally. People have recognised a range of feelings and responses that seem new or different, complex or confusing. On 23 March, business guru Scott Berinato published an article entitled 'The Discomfort you are feeling is Grief'[1], in which he describes his interview with David Kessler, who is an expert on grief with specialisms in biohazard environments, traumatic events and disasters. Kessler explains the complex grief arising from this pandemic: There is a loss of certainty or 'normality' from the past, and an anticipatory grief and fear of future loss of security (jobs, financial, health, relational, meeting everyday needs), as well as anticipated, or actual loss of loved ones. Importantly, it is a collective grief. We are grieving and mourning on both macro and a micro levels, as communities and as individuals.

[1] Hartford Business Review, March 2020 https://hbr.org/2020/03/that-discomfort-youre-feeling-is-grief

[2.] **Making sense of grief**: For simplicity, I will loosely define the terms 'bereavement' as what happens to you, 'grief' or 'grieving' as what you feel or are feeling, and 'mourning' as what you do. It may be helpful to note that there are a number of models that describe the range of experiences of grief and mourning, with no set order or duration. Each person finds a unique path through. Kessler co-authored books with Kübler-Ross who identified five broad elements: denial (shock and disbelief that the loss has occurred), anger (that someone we love is no longer here), bargaining (all the what-ifs and regrets), depression (sadness from the loss) and acceptance (acknowledging the reality of the loss). Kessler added 'meaning' as a final key element. Recently I read another article by Kessler, in which he reflected on his personal experience of grief following the loss of his 21 year old son. [2] He writes:

> 'Through meaning, we can find more than pain. When a loved one dies, or when we experience any kind of serious loss – the end of a marriage, the closing of the company where we work, the destruction of our home in a natural disaster – we want more than the hard fact of that loss. We want to find meaning. Loss can wound and paralyse. It can hang over us for years. But finding meaning in loss empowers us to find a path forwards. Meaning helps us make sense of grief'.

[3.] **Christian context:** How does this connect with meditation in the Christian tradition? I perceive three aspects: firstly, the practical aspect of being present and embodied, experiencing the fullness of all our senses as we touch the pain (taking care to listen to how much we can safely bear without being emotionally flooded); secondly, meditation helps us to welcome and accept all experiences, not rejecting them; thirdly, the healing power of love is central in the scriptures, the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, meeting and embracing the depths of suffering. For example these verses:

> *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.* (Lamentations 3:22, 32-33)
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> *Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted* (Matthew 5:4)
>
> *Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.* (John 16:20)
>
> *And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.* (1 John 4:16)

[4.] Brazillian priest Júlio Lancellotti concluded: 'There is no love without pain; but only love can heal that pain which it causes'. In 'The Book of Joy'[3], Douglas Abrams interviews two long-time practitioners of meditation, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. On the subject of grief, Tutu emphasises the relationship between the pain level of grief and the depth of love for the person (or experience) lost; a part of ourselves dies with them. He stresses the value of expressing feelings as honestly and as fully as possible, especially tears and anger, including any anger towards God. Reflecting on the loss of a young leader during the apartheid struggles he recalled, "I broke down and Leah [his wife] held me, like I was a baby. It think it helped because later on I had to go and preach at his funeral, and we had a

[2] Kessler, D. (2020) 'Finding meaning after loss'. 'Therapy Today, June 2020, vol 1 Issue 5. BACP.
[3] Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, with Douglas Abrams (2016) 'The Book of Joy'.

huge crowd of people who were very, very angry. I knew how they felt, because I had been through the same sort of thing and could appeal to them". The Dalai Lama noted how nobody remains untouched by deep loss, and knowing that we are all in this together can help to process the pain.

[5.] **Sacred presence:** In the depth of suffering, deep personal growth might be experienced as divine or sacred, a soul journey, healing, or a spiritual awakening. C.S.Lewis observed: 'Grief isn't a state but a process. It keeps on changing, like a winding road with quite a new landscape at each bend'. Sigmund Freud concluded of mourning: 'Love and work, work and love, that's all there is'.

Kessler elaborates on the meaning that he discovered in his greatest loss: 'Meaning is the love I feel for my son. Meaning is the way I've chosen to bear witness to the gifts he gave me ... what I've tried to do to keep others from dying of the same thing that killed David. For all of us, meaning is a reflection of the love we have for those we've lost. Meaning is the sixth stage of grief where the healing often resides.'

[6.] Mourning and meaning cannot be forced, but we can adopt the inner stance that renders us most open to its unfolding. I'd like to read a blessing that invites us into such sacred spaces.

A Blessing For Grief - by John O'Donohue

When you lose someone you love,
Your life becomes strange,
The ground beneath you becomes fragile,
Your thoughts make your eyes unsure;
And some dead echo drags your voice down
Where words have no confidence.

Your heart has grown heavy with loss;
And though this loss has wounded others too,
No one knows what has been taken from you
When the silence of absence deepens.

Flickers of guilt kindle regret
For all that was left unsaid or undone.

There are days when you wake up happy;
Again inside the fullness of life,
Until the moment breaks
And you are thrown back
Onto the black tide of loss.

Days when you have your heart back,
You are able to function well
Until in the middle of work or encounter,
Suddenly with no warning,
You are ambushed by grief.

It becomes hard to trust yourself.
All you can depend on now is that
Sorrow will remain faithful to itself.

More than you, it knows its way
And will find the right time
To pull and pull the rope of grief
Until that coiled hill of tears
Has reduced to its last drop.

Gradually, you will learn acquaintance
With the invisible form of your departed;
And, when the work of grief is done,
The wound of loss will heal
And you will have learned
To wean your eyes
From that gap in the air
And be able to enter the hearth
In your soul where your loved one
Has awaited your return
All the time.

[7.] **Simple wisdom:** Author and artist Charlie Mackesy incorporates much wisdom in his beautifully illustrated book, 'The Boy the Mole the Fox and the Horse'. Before we move into

our meditation I offer a selection of wise words from these four friends, reflecting on crisis, grief, suffering, friendship, comfort and love:

> "Everyone is a bit scared," said the horse, "But we're less scared together."
>
> "When have you been at your strongest asked the boy?" "When I dared show my weakness"
>
> "Tears fall for a reason and they are your strength not weakness."
>
> "Asking for help isn't giving up" said the horse. "It's refusing to give up."
>
> "Nothing beats kindness," said the horse. "It sits quietly beyond all things."
>
> "What do we do when our hearts hurt?" asked the boy. "We wrap them with friendship, shared tears and time, till they wake hopeful and happy again."

Preparing for Meditation

[8.] As we prepare for our meditation, adjust your posture to a comfortable position. Notice your breathing, and once noticed, its rhythm will naturally slow. Now take your attention to your connection with the floor and the chair or the cushion. You may wish to pay particular attention today to inviting within you a space of acceptance and loving kindness, into which any feelings or sensations can arise. As far as possible, be present, open and awake, not clinging to anything and not rejecting anything.

Be gentle with yourself, knowing that if experiences of grief come into awareness, they can be met with love, deepening and slowing your breath if you need to bring soothing and calm. There is no need to complete the full 25 minutes if that is not for you today. Simply notice what you need in this time. We begin with the sound of the bell.

Bell Sounds…

20-minute meditations begins…Count down timer starts

Bell Sounds…Meditation ends

Ends with usual closing prayers: Through Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, by whose breath our souls are raised to life, we in meditation in this time of crisis pray with all others, as one community and one world to One God, we unite with our brothers and sisters around the world. Moments of your personal prayer follow**…Amen**

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon

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