Meditation on Tension in a Changed world – 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.

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

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition

Opening Prayer: **Opening Prayer:** Eternal God, through our meditation may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word.1 May we seek and find You.3 Awakened to Your presence may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self awareness.4 May we follow Your teaching, seeking also, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, stability, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Reflections on tension in a changed world

Introduction: Several people have described to me recently that they are noticing more anger and irritability in people they meet. Others have described their own tensions as they experience moving out into a changed world as Covid-19 restrictions ease further. I relate to this as I attempt to venture out within a new set of 'rules'. 'Rules' seem to imply that things should be black and white and yet they are not. Each person has their own interpretation and these may lead to conflicting desires, and fears when things feel out of our control.

I notice that the tension I experience on the inside will manifest on the outside in relationships and in my actions; conversely, tension I experience on the outside in relationships, will affect my inner experience. As Nora Bateson said, 'Finding where exactly the outside world ends and I begin—is not so easy'.

Tension and collective trauma: Early in the Covid-19 crisis, David Ison, the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, shared from a group which worked on a three year project on trauma and tragedy in Christian congregations. He described the typical phases:

> 'Communities (and individuals) typically respond to disaster by first going through a 'heroic phase', full of energy and self-sacrifice. This eventually burns itself out, and is followed by a 'disillusionment phase', which may contain much mutual blame and suspicion. Only as the disillusionment phase loses its force can realistic, hopeful rebuilding take place.'[1]

[1] Winchester Diocese update 26 Mar 2020

Perhaps there is something of the disillusionment phase manifesting in this tension. So many people are having to deal with uncertainty, the unexpected, the new, the changed, the additional demands that arise in an 'in-between' world. This can overwhelm. The terms FOMO and FOGO have pertinent meaning – 'Fear Of Missing Out' and 'Fear Of Going Out'[2]. Those staying at home for whatever reason may feel they are missing out. Others required to go beyond their comfort zone may fear going out. There are ongoing tensions between economy and infection control, between urge to touch loved ones and need to socially distance, etc.

This tension between opposites is illustrated in the parable of the weeds which seems to hold Wisdom in how we might experience tension in a new way.

> **Jesus' Parable of the weeds among the wheat** - Matthew 13:24-30 (NRSV)
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> **24** He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; **25** but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. **26** So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. **27** And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' **28** He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' **29** But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. **30** Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Contemplative and mystic Bryce Haymond[3] interprets each aspect of this parable in relation to two states of consciousness, 'dual' (or black and white) consciousness in the weeds, and 'nondual unitive' consciousness in the wheat. There is a tension between the wheat and the weeds, which the slaves (of the ego) see as conflicting, but the sower, being God or 'Ultimate Reality', accepts these and allows them to coexist, to 'grow together until the 'harvest'. Haymond says that, 'Sleep is a good analogy of the way that consciousness falls into a kind of waking dream behind the veil of the dualistic mind and identification with the separate egoic self, the self most of us think we are. We become unconscious of who we really are in our depths.' He also notes that it is impossible for the ego to get rid of the ego and a lot of frustration and suffering is experienced in spiritual life if we try to repress or kill it off.

Attention to tension: In meditation, we learn to step back from immersion in the experience itself (which often feels black and white), and be open to the 'observing mind' or the Holy Spirit or the 'The Stable Witness' as Richard Rohr names it in his exploration of holding the tension of opposites. [4] Rohr explains how we need to stay with the tension and allow it to speak to us and learn to enter into the paradox where we experience both opposites at the same time. He invites his audience to hold an unlit candle that represents a tension of opposites, and only light the candle when the tension truly feels released.

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[2] Psychology Today April 2020

[3] Bryce Haymond (2018) 'A Mystical Interpretation of Jesus' Parable of the Tares'

[4] Richard Rohr and Mary Beth Ingham, 2007. 'Holding the Tension: The Power of Paradox'. CAC (CD)

In a piece called 'The Shining Word AND', Richard Rohr reflects on how the word 'AND' embraces paradox. After this reading we will have a short time of silence in which we might notice what comes to our attention when we reflect on the word 'tension'.

'The Shining Word "AND" (extracts) by Richard Rohr [5]

"And" teaches us to say yes
"And" allows us to be both-and
"And" keeps us from either-or
"And" teaches us to be patient and long-suffering
"And" is willing to wait for insight and integration
"And" keeps us from dualistic thinking
"And" does not divide the field of the moment
"And" helps us to live in the always imperfect now
"And" keeps us inclusive and compassionate toward everything
"And" heals our racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism
"And" helps us face and accept our own dark side
"And" allows us to ask for forgiveness and to apologize
"And" is the mystery of paradox in all things.
"And" makes daily, practical love possible

What do you notice of your own tension? What form does it take? Is it in relationships, feelings, beliefs, thought processes? Do you notice tension in your body? Frankly, tension can be unpleasant, even debilitating. And yet, the point at which the opposites meet can be where transformation takes place. It is precisely where the roots and canopies of wheat and weeds meet and interact, that healing and learning and new possibilities emerge into consciousness.

Our body seems to hold a vital role. It can guide us to the point of tension, and it can support the release of tension because it does not judge itself. We can find courage through regrounding in our body, returning to that, noticing it, listening to it, attuning to its movement with kindness, free of judgement. The body holds the Wisdom and the source of the Wisdom is the soul.

Irish poet and priest, John O'Donohue, expresses this well:

> 'Your mind can deceive you and put all kinds of barriers between you and your nature; but your body does not lie. Your body tells you, if you attend to it, how your life is and if you are living from your soul or from the labyrinths of your negativity. . . . The human body is the most complex, refined, and harmonious totality.
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> Your body is, in essence, a crowd of different members who work in harmony to make your belonging in the world possible. . . . The soul is not simply within the body, hidden somewhere within its recesses. The truth is rather the converse. Your body is in the soul. And the soul suffuses you completely.' [6]

[5] Richard Rohr (2010, pp 180-181) 'The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See'
[6] John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* (Harper Perennial: 1998), 48-49.

Preparing for Meditation

As we prepare for our meditation, if it feels right today, before you move, allow yourself time to notice any tension in your body and stay with it a little while. What might it be holding? Can you take kindness to it? Can you breathe into it? You might allow the body to 'speak' through any message it might have for you in words or images, or by showing you how it needs to move, standing up if that feels right. It may be that the muscles need to tighten and then release, or to adjust to a more comfortable position. Now take your attention to your connection with the floor and the chair or the cushion. As far as possible, allow a spaciousness for the 'observing mind', staying present, open and awake, not clinging to anything and not rejecting anything. Be gentle with yourself, knowing that any awareness of tension can be met with love, and a deepening and slowing your breath can bring soothing and calm. There is no expectation to complete the full 25 minutes if that is not for you today. Simply notice what you need in this time. We begin meditation with the sound of the bell.

Bell Sounds…25-minute meditations begins…Count down timer starts

Bell Sounds…Meditation ends

Prayers after meditation

Praying
By Mary Oliver

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

Closing Prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God…Moments of your personal prayer follow…Amen

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

For meditation groups, prayer groups, spirituality, wellbeing, retreats, workshops and our labyrinth garden, please visit our website: **wisdomhouseromsey.co.uk**



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