Reflections on 'Digging Deep' –27th January 2021 – prepared by Hazel, drawing on the works of John O'Donohue and Terry Waite

Welcome! Thank you for being with us: We meditate in our own homes at 7.30pm on Wednesday. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions. We have attached some pictures / resources to accompany the words to help you in your meditation.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: Eternal God, through our meditation may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-awareness. 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**

Introduction: These reflections were inspired by personal communications with front line healthcare staff and users of health and care services. They focus on the need to dig deep into the depths of inner resources to keep going for the long haul, however long that might be. Fear, grief, exhaustion, uncertainty and helplessness mix with commitment, professionalism, bravery, kindness and love. Such feelings are not confined to healthcare settings; there can be few people whose resilience is not being challenged in some way at this time.

I have selected some writings that inspired me on this theme of digging deep. They seemed to speak for themselves, and so I will give a very brief introduction to each, and suggest that you may wish to pause for a little time after each and gently notice anything that might arise or resonate.

Words of Jesus: On hearing the words below, on the surface level of suffering, perhaps we may not imagine comfort being possible, but if we allow the words to go deeper, what richness might arise?

> *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* Matthew 11:28-30

Words of Terry Waite: Although our experiences are unique and are affected by our past as well as our present, it can be helpful to learn from someone who has dug deep within themselves in extreme adversity. Terry Waite was taken hostage in Beirut in 1987 and was held for nearly five years in solitary confinement:

> He reflects:(1) *"I had to come to terms with those extreme feelings. … And the way to do that in part, is to try and live for the moment; try and make the moment as full as possible. … I had to do that by mentally adjusting to the situation, saying, "There is little or nothing I can do to change this, but I can hold onto the fact that I have life now - not tomorrow, and I'm going to live it as fully as possible". … and I began to write in my head, to use my mental capacity and that was a way of surviving.'*

In his book 'Out of the Silence' Terry Waite(2) explains that he wrote the poem 'At Night' when feeling the terror of being 'deeply alone in a vast universe' and 'in need of human companionship and the assurance that religious belief brings to some. I did not feel the close presence of God but nevertheless I cried out':

'At Night' by Terry Waite [2]

In the silent recesses of night
All without is still.
The fever of life is over,
The busy world is hushed.
In the silent recesses of night
All is still.

In the silent recesses of night
My eyes close.
Fever over,
World hushed.
Deep within,
In the silent recesses of the soul,
Fever rages.

Be still my soul,
Be still.
Be at one with your creator,
Healer,
Father,
Mother,
Giver of life.

In the silent recesses of night
Across the ocean of dreams,
Fear stalks my soul.
The waters are deep;
There is no chart.
In feverish haste I reach out;
Hold me,
Hold me,
Then I shall be still.

In the silent recesses of night
I sleep.
The ocean calms,
Stillness enters my soul.
Stillness within,
Stillness without,
A restless stillness.

In the silent recesses of night
I sleep alone.
Alone on the ocean,
Longing to be held,
Longing to be safe,
Longing to be healed.
The fever of life is over.
The busy world is hushed.
I rest in my creator,
But for a moment.
Heal me O God.
Without you I drown.



Terry Waite has since used his experiences to support others whose loved ones have been taken hostage. This second poem describes his felt empathy for others' pain. To me it expresses a glowing Wisdom of compassion transforming suffering – a digging deep into the depths, and finding Love.

'**Pain'** by Terry Waite [2]

The pain
Sears my soul,
Penetrates to the very depth
Of my being.

At night,
Alone,
I weep
The tears
Of anguish,
Of loss,
Of despair.

Take heart.
Through pain
You have entered
A new realm.
You have joined
The community of compassion.
Your sorrow will be turned
To joy,
Your tears
Will become laughter,
Your wound will remain,
But now through suffering,
You have a new depth of soul.



Words of John O'Donohue:

When we become exhausted in the long haul of the life we are living, for whatever reason, how do we dig deep to take care of ourselves as best we can? The normal factors in self-care of course come to mind [4, 5] – such as keeping in touch with others in whatever way is feasible, keeping active, learning a new skill if we have time – particularly something creative, giving to others in some way – in our work, volunteering, keeping in touch, etc, and of course a mindfulness or meditation practice is a so valuable. Being able to be still and notice our feelings – observing and not fighting them can be so helpful, bringing compassion and kindness to ourselves just as we are. Meditation allows a freer way of going deep, without such hard digging. The following two blessings by John O'Donohue illustrate such a process and how we might be open to what we find as we go deeper.

A Blessing For One Who Is Exhausted by John O'Donohue [3] (extracts)

When the rhythm of the heart becomes hectic,
Time takes on the strain until it breaks;
Then all the unattended stress falls in
On the mind like an endless, increasing weight,

The light in the mind becomes dim.
Things you could take in your stride before
Now become laboursome events of will.

Weariness invades your spirit.
Gravity begins falling inside you,
Dragging down every bone.

The tide you never valued has gone out.
And you are marooned on unsure ground.
Something within you has closed down;
And you cannot push yourself back to life.

Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles you rushed through.

Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.

Imitate the habit of twilight,
Taking time to open the well of colour
That fostered the brightness of day.

Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.
Be excessively gentle with yourself.

Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.
Learn to linger around someone of ease
Who feels they have all the time in the world.

Gradually, you will return to yourself,
Having learned a new respect for your heart
And the joy that dwells far within slow time.

In this next blessing, I notice the illusiveness of the unknown depths of 'self', and yet this holds us in our journey, even when our experience is of living just in our mind, unaware of the activity and gold in the depths:

'A blessing For the Unknown Self' by John O'Donohue [3] (extracts)

So much of what delights and troubles you
Happens on a surface
You take for ground.
Your mind thinks your life alone,
Your eyes consider air your nearest neighbor,
Yet it seems that a little below your heart
There houses in you an unknown self
Who prefers the patterns of the dark
And is not persuaded by the eye's affection
Or caught by the flash of thought.

It is a self that enjoys contemplative patience
With all your unfolding expression,
Is never drawn to break into light
Though you entangle yourself in unworthiness
And misjudge what you do and who you are.

It dwells in a strange, yet rhythmic ease
That is not ruffled by disappointment;
It presides in a deeper current of time
Free from the force of cause and sequence
That otherwise shapes your life.

It works most resolutely at night
As the poet who draws your dreams,
Creating for you many secret doors,
Decorated with pictures of your hunger;

It has the dignity of the angelic
That knows you to your roots,
Always awaiting your deeper befriending
To take you beyond the threshold of want,
Where all your diverse strainings
Can come to wholesome ease.

Preparation for Meditation: Before beginning our meditation, you may wish to adjust your posture, paying particular attention to the energy in your body and the rhythm of your breath, taking a calming deep breath in through your nose, and a slow breath out, letting go fully. Then repeat this a few times. If you have a sacred word you might notice its rhythm, and perhaps how your word is in time with the breath. Allow yourself to stay gently present, open and awake, neither clinging to, nor rejecting, anything.

We will now meditate for 25-minutes.

Finally, a blessing for nurses and all those whose work is dedicated to the care of others:
'A blessing For Nurses' by John O'Donohue [3] (extracts)

In this fragile frontier-place, your kindness
Becomes a light that consoles the broken-hearted,
Awakens within desperate storms
That oasis of serenity that calls
The spirit to rise from beneath the weight of pain,
To create a new space in the person's mind
Where they gain distance from their suffering
And begin to see the invitation
To integrate and transform it.

May you embrace the beauty in what you do
And how you stand like a secret angel
Between the bleak despair of illness
And the unquenchable light of spirit
That can turn the darkest destiny towards dawn.

May you never doubt the gifts you bring;
Rather, learn from these frontiers
Wisdom for your own heart.
May you come to inherit
The blessings of your kindness
And never be without care and love
When winter enters your own life.



Florence Nightingale with her lamp

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. Stay safe and well.

Resources: Pictures from Pixabay.com / author

(1) Terry Waite on finding the positives in lockdown YouTube, Sky News
(2) Terry Waite (2016). 'Out of the Silence'. London: SPCK
(3) John O'Donohue (2007). 'Benedictus: A Book of Blessings'. London: Bantom Press.
(4) NHS (2019) 'Five Steps to Mental Wellbeing'
(5) MIND (2021) 'Coronavirus and your mental health'



Our peaceful outdoor spaces promote wellbeing and are open to all, free of charge.