Reflection on: Uncertainty, Fear and Anger

This week, we are meditating in person and have a transcript for those unable to join us. We have included some pictures and resources to help you in your meditation. If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate at 7.30pm on Wednesday in Wisdom Centre/in our homes. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centring Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob and Hazel - 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: We are living in times of great uncertainty and worry. Having emerged from the disruption and fear of the Covid virus, we have immediately had to cope with the suffering of innocent people in a grossly unfair war and with the uncertainty of what an apparently callous despot might do next. How do we deal with the uncertainties, fear, anger and depression which may arise within us? Tonight I shall seek guidance from His Holiness the Dalai Lama who himself had to cope with the overrunning of his country by the Chinese, and his consequent escape and exile, and also from the Gyalwang Drukpa.

Our Fundamental Nature



In, '*The Art of Happiness - a Handbook for Living',* the Dalai Lama is in conversation with Howard Cutler and, despite his experiences, he takes an optimistic position: "Now, we are made to seek happiness. And it is clear that feelings of love, affection, closeness and compassion bring happiness. I believe that every one of us has the basis to be happy, to access the warm and compassionate states of mind that bring happiness. In fact it is one of my fundamental beliefs that not only do we inherently possess the potential for compassion, but I believe that the basis or underlying nature of human beings is gentleness. I think the subject of human affection or compassion isn't just a religious matter; it's an indispensable factor in one's day-to-day life. "Our physical structure seems to be more suited to feelings of love and compassion. We can see how a calm, affectionate, wholesome state of mind has beneficial effect on our health and physical well-being. Conversely, feelings of frustration, fear, agitation and anger can be destructive to our health.

"We can also see that our emotional health is enhanced by feelings of affection. Or observe how our own affectionate feelings or attitudes automatically and naturally affect us from within, how they make us feel. These gentler emotions and the positive behaviours that go with them lead to a happier family and community life.

"So I think that we can infer that our fundamental human nature is one of gentleness. And if this is the case, then it makes all the more sense to try to live in a way of life that is more in accordance with this basic gentle nature of our being."

War and Conflict

Howard Cutler asks: "If our essential nature is kind and compassionate, I'm just wondering how you account for all the conflicts and aggressive behaviours that are all around us." The Dalai Lama nodded thoughtfully for a moment before replying, "Of course we can't ignore the fact that conflicts do exist, not only within an individual mind but also within the family, when we interact with other people and at the societal level, the national level, and the global level. So, looking at this, some people conclude that human nature is basically aggressive. They may point to human history, suggesting that compared to other mammals' human nature is much more aggressive. Or they may claim, 'Yes, compassion is a part of our mind. But anger is also a part of our mind. They are equally a part of our nature, both are more or less at the same level.' Nonetheless," he said firmly, leaning forward in his chair, straining with alertness, "it is still my firm conviction that human nature is essentially compassionate, gentle. That is the predominate feature of human nature. Anger, violence and aggression may certainly arise, but I think it's on a secondary or more superficial level; in a sense, they arise when we are frustrated in our efforts to achieve love and affection. They are not part of our most basic underlying nature.

"So, although aggression can occur, I believe that these conflicts aren't necessarily because of human nature but rather a result of the human intellect – unbalanced human intelligence, misuse of our intelligence, our imaginative faculty. Now in looking at human evolution, I think that compared to other animals' our physical body may have been very weak. But because of the development of human intelligence, we were able to use many instruments and discover many methods to conquer adverse environmental conditions. As human society and environmental conditions gradually became more complex, this required a greater and greater role of our intelligence and cognitive ability to meet the ever-increasing demands of this complex environment. So, I believe that our underlying or fundamental nature is gentleness, and intelligence is a later development. And I think that if that human ability, that human intelligence, develops in an unbalanced way, without being properly counterbalanced with compassion, then it can become destructive. It can lead to disaster."

Pausing there, we have recently witnessed in the world, not only disastrous conflict and aggression with inevitable profound suffering, but also the most heart-rending acts of kindness and compassion, people going out of their way to help one another, staying behind when they might easily be killed to look after a vulnerable person, people, some themselves very poor, accepting refugees with open arms and not forgetting the bravery of protesters in Russia including the employee of the television station who was prepared to sacrifice her own wellbeing and liberty by putting the true picture on air. I think that the reason why we tend to overstate the amount of anger and aggression in the world is that its effects can be so devastating, and consequently it is 'newsworthy' whereas acts of kindness and compassion are usually often unobtrusive and overlooked. I think that the Dalai Lama is right that they are actually more common than acts of aggression, and that our true underlying nature is one of kindness, co-operation and gentleness. I also think he is right about the effects of the misuse of intelligence and imagination, and the possibility of those aspects of our nature becoming unbalanced and unrestrained, and we have certainly seen an example of that. Maybe President Putin is acutely aware of the body's frailty and weakness – that might explain why he tends to present himself in a macho kind of way and also his obsessive fear of getting close to people in the Covid crisis. He may therefore, as the Dalai Lama suggests, turn to the use of weapons and instruments of power to compensate. Whilst being horrified that he has the ability to wreak so much destruction, we can perhaps emphasise to an extent with those psychological needs.

Our Response

His Holiness continued: "But, I think it is important to recognise that if human conflicts are created by misuse of human intelligence, we can also utilise our intelligence to find ways and means to overcome

these conflicts. When human intelligence and human goodness or affection are used together, all human actions become constructive. When we combine a warm heart with knowledge and education, we can learn to respect others' views and others' rights. This becomes the basis of a spirit of reconciliation that can be used to overcome aggression and resolve our conflicts. This is not at all easy in the present crisis, but I think that there are indications that movements of that kind are beginning to take root.

Transforming Anger

I would like to add to those reflections of the Dalai Lama some thoughts of the Gyalwang Drukpa from his book 'Everyday Enlightenment - Walking the Path to Happiness in the Modern World'.

"If we don't have individual peace, how can we hope to have peace in the world? How can we develop this sense of peace and turn anger into compassion?"

"Peace is the natural state of your mind, of your nature. But so long as you struggle on under the control of your ego or your attachments you will struggle to experience it. We have a great peace in our mind, but we don't realise it. That is why we struggle in our lives, why things become destructive."

"There are things in life that just always seem to push our anger buttons. Anger may seem a hundred per cent justified, as in the face of a bully or if a terrible harm has been done to a loved one. I think the key is to investigate our anger, rather than blindly follow it, and feel with our hearts whether it is an anger that is part of the healing process towards forgiveness or if it does no one any good at all and just makes us feel very uncomfortable."

"We forget that we have the ability to inspire and lead by example and can end up caught in fiery exchanges or emotions that tend to get us nowhere."

"Once we can recognise our anger, we can begin to think more constructively around it, we can take a step to the side of it, breathe slowly and deeply and ask ourselves how we might better handle the situation."

Fear and Anxiety

As well as anger, there is inevitably also at this time of uncertainty a great deal of fear and anxiety. There is the fear of aggression spreading, the worrying background thought about the presence of nuclear weapons, prices and the cost of living are all going up, and we no longer feel completely safe or secure.

The Gyalwang Drukpa also writes: "Fear and anxiety seem to be at epidemic levels in this modern age. If you live with high expectations of life then fear is natural as you worry about what will happen if life goes against your plans. And because life rarely goes according to plan, perhaps you have previously encountered disappointment and consequently fear that if you take a chance you will meet it again.

"Being fearless doesn't mean you will never encounter fears for they are a natural part of our hopes, which in turn are a natural part of life. Like anger, fear can be a great teacher. Our strongest tools for understanding and challenging our fears come back to love and compassion. As you develop compassion there is less room for the ego and so less room for fear. This can take some time as often the ego is so strong. You have to at first accept yourself and then you will begin to have room for others too and send out your love as radiance, perhaps first with your immediate family and then gradually to everybody. Nothing is stronger than love, it is the strongest power in this world and it will keep you fearless." Thankfully we are seeing that loving response, amidst all the horror, from so many in the world.

Beginning Meditation: So we will now enter a period of formal meditation, moving into a comfortable position relaxing the body and letting go of the efforts, difficulties, triumphs and worries of our day. Bringing ourselves into the peace and the completeness of the present moment. Noticing our breathing as it slows and deepens. Giving attention to any points of tension or discomfort in the body. If you use a sacred word you might notice its rhythm, perhaps co-ordinating it with the rhythm of the breathing.

Or you may wish simply to focus on a candle or to follow the breath. Allowing and acknowledging every arrival into our mind, every experience, but not attaching or holding them up - just allowing them to go on their way, like the porter in a guest house. Returning to our meditation object or point of focus whenever we are aware of the mind wandering off, in a spirit of non-judgmental acceptance.

We will meditate together for 25 minutes.

Bell Sounds … 25-minute meditations begins … Count down timer starts (this may be your own watch or meditation timer app)
Bell Sounds … Meditation ends

Post Meditation poem: I will end with Thomas Hardy's poem …

In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'

I
Only a man harrowing clods
In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
Half asleep as they stalk.

II
Only thin smoke without flame
From the heaps of couch-grass;
Yet this will go on the same
Though Dynasties pass.

III
Yonder a maid and her wight
Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
Ere their story die.

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.

Images/ resources:
HH Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler - *The Art of Happiness Handbook for Living, Hodder and Stoughton*
HH Gyalwang Drukpa - *Everyday enlightenment, Walking the Path to Happiness in the Modern World, Penguin Books*
Thomas Hardy -*The Complete Poems, Macmillan London Ltd*
Photograph from Pixabay



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