

STILL POINT · TURNING WORLD
~ exploring the integration of spirituality in healthcare

**An International Dialogue and Retreat
at
Global Retreat Centre, Nuneham Courtney, Oxfordshire
20th – 23rd September 2012**



Background

Still point - turning world was a three-day retreat exploring the integration of spirituality in healthcare, held at the Global Retreat Centre in Oxfordshire 20th-23rd September 2012. The Janki Foundation for Global Healthcare (UK), Point of Life Foundation (USA), Global Hospital Research Centre (Rajasthan, India), and the Brahma Kumaris (UK, USA, Australia and India) jointly hosted the event. The organisers, led by Dr Sarah Egger, wished to develop new ways of understanding and talking about the extraordinary challenges and opportunities of integrating the spiritual dimension into current paradigms and practices of healthcare. But they wanted to do so without having keynote addresses, lectures, PowerPoints and all the presentational paraphernalia that conference goers have become so accustomed to over the decades. The intention was to deepen and personalise participants' exploration and experience of the theme of the retreat. Equally important was the desire to form, with the Retreat's participants, a collaborative community whose members would feel comfortable sharing their expertise in a variety of novel formats.

Significantly, this was a retreat in every sense of the word. Global Retreat Centre is a splendid 18th century Palladian villa in Nuneham Courtney, set deep in the Oxfordshire countryside—an atmosphere wholly conducive to reflection and relaxation. The 65 participants (15 of whom were overseas visitors) attended, all of whom have worked in the field of spirituality and healthcare for many years.

This is a report of the main sessions and does not include the other activities such as coming together for meals, meditations, journaling, singing, walking in the grounds and talking and listening in small and large groups.

The Programme

Thursday evening Welcome and introductions

Friday morning Creative journaling and café conversations

Friday afternoon Personal time, free space and large groups

Friday evening Concert by Bliss

Saturday morning Still point dialogues

Saturday afternoon Silence and conversation on compassion

Saturday evening Group entertainment

Sunday morning Action planning and closure

THURSDAY Evening

Welcome

Participants were welcomed to the retreat, given the context of the retreat and an overview of the weekend.

An entertaining ice-breaker was used: the group had to organise themselves, in silence, in a line based on the order of their birth date. It was followed by pairs (with background music) sharing the questions “What do I want from this weekend and what makes you smile?”

FRIDAY Morning

Creative journaling

The morning session was convened by Jackee Holder, who conducted a session on creative journaling. She asked participants to see the present in healthcare and visualise the future. The first exercise was free writing to get in touch with feelings and emotions, using word prompts on cards to contemplate and for the participants to write what it meant to them. This was followed by pairs sharing their reflections. The next exercise involved choosing a picture of a tree and writing how that image might reflect who we are and what meaning it has for us. Again pairs shared, before feeding back to the main groups. Then we tried writing with our non-dominant hand. Finally we had an opportunity to write about places or things that contributed to our restorative practice. We experienced and discussed the benefits of journaling to our well being, both as a source of inspiration and as an guide to the search for personal meaning

Café Conversations

Participants were invited to join in groups of eight to develop themes of the previous session. The name 'café' was to indicate an easy, open style of conversation as if one was sitting with friends sharing a cup of tea.

The group facilitators encouraged the groups to focus on the following questions.

1. What is spirituality for me now? How do I bring spirituality into my daily life as a healthcare professional?
2. What are the ways of managing the challenges of integrating spirituality and healthcare?

The main points of the discussion were recorded on flipcharts and at the end of this session the facilitators met to condense from these discussions 8 eight themes to discuss in the next session.

The 8 Themes were

1. Language
2. Conscious presence
3. Spirituality and community
4. Changing organisational culture through spirituality
5. Walking your spiritual talk
6. Compassion for self and resilience
7. Creativity in healing
8. Structures and tools for building a spiritual community

FRIDAY Afternoon

Free space groups.

There were 8 designated groups and each group focused on one of the themes. The process of 'free space' groups is similar to 'open space technology' in that participants can move freely between groups as their interest takes them. In addition participants were asked to consider these questions.

Why is this theme important to me personally?

What are the questions that I am holding regarding our inquiry into this theme?

How is this theme related to the exploration of spirituality in healthcare?

Large group

All the participants reconvened in a plenary. A recorder from each group gave a brief summary of the conversations they'd had and cumulatively this proved to be rich and thoughtful.

After a creative session the group switched into a more reflective discourse using a 'talking stick' where the person holding the stick would be able to speak without interruption.

SATURDAY morning

The Still-point Dialogues

These were ten minute on-stage conversations, performed by pairs of guests who had previously been invited to participate and who had been briefed as to the format of the presentation. Of key importance was the fact that they were encouraged to have a natural, spontaneous, unscripted conversation, in which they would speak with each other, rather than to the audience.

The first stage: This was the actual conversation between the pairs. Each conversation (there were seven consecutive dialogues) began with several moments of reflective silence.

The second stage: Following a break for refreshments each of the pairs moved to designated spaces in several rooms for small group discussions to be joined by the rest of the participants. People were free to choose which group they wish to join and were encouraged to move freely between groups. The aim was to continue and develop the ideas shared by the original dialoguing pairs. The feedback sheets were displayed on the room's walls after the session for people to contemplate.

The third stage: This involved everyone gathering for a 30-minute plenary. To encourage participation, the 'talking stick' performed the symbolic function of allowing the person in whose possession it was to speak without interruption.

The full transcripts of all dialogues can be found in the British Holistic Medical Association Journal Dec 2012, website link <http://www.bhma.org/> - email Craig Brown on contactbhma@aol.co.uk if you want to be able to access the journal on the website.

SATURDAY afternoon

Silence

Before we ourselves had a period of silence Sister Jayanti spoke on how to use silence to reflect on what we have in our heart and in our life. Silence opens up a different space. When we allow the brain to be still, we are able to access a different spectrum of reality. In this period of silence, there is communication through the eyes. Walking together in silence is a powerful experience of being held together. It is through silence we appreciate Nature and learn to be an instrument to restore Nature. Another aspect of silence is appreciation of the self, to begin to love myself, of respecting the self and respecting others. What is it that I need to adjust, amend, and eliminate, - to be able to see both sides – to share happiness with the self, others and Nature?

After an afternoon in silence we came together for 30 minutes meditation.

Conversation on compassion

The discussion between Dr Ashok Mehta and Jean Watson was about practising compassion with detachment from expectations.

Compassion is a deep natural tendency to be kind to people irrespective of their needs, and cultivate a place to be a healing presence for the patients and family members. If we understand that compassion resides in the heart, we can learn to hold that still point of peace and love. We can draw on that source to hold one in the midst of the chaos and give out light and love.

The importance of being a role model was stressed. The intention of wanting to establish a holistic healthcare facility with spirituality embedded in the services was discussed.

Group reflection

Using the talking stick approach again the group reflected on what the key insights and learning were so far. People expressed their gratitude to be at this retreat and how its emphasis on the importance of silence made them consider some practical ways of incorporating compassion into their work.

SUNDAY morning

Action Planning

The morning began with Jan Alcoe leading the group in a visualisation based on a 'river of learning', to help participants to deeply reflect on personal insights and learning from the event, and to envision future changes in their own practice and workplaces. Following the visualisation, they were invited to capture these insights in the form of spontaneous drawings. The next session, led by Jackee Holder, invited participants to write down their intentions for expressing spirituality in their own work settings, including what practices or actions might be different and what current practices they might build on. They shared their thoughts in pairs, with each person helping the other to consider how they might put one thing into practice and what support or help they might need. Everyone was invited to complete a luggage tag - on one side saying what they had brought to the event, and on the other, saying what they were taking away. Finally, Jackee demonstrated a deeply spiritual and affirming greeting and participants walked around the room and 'greeted' individuals they connected with in this way.

Closure

We finished with a closing ritual and a beautiful poem read by Sue Howard called 'The True Professional' by Margaret Wheatley. We finished in the time-honoured way of being given a gift, a sweet and a blessing shared with love through the eyes.

Creative space sessions with Pearl Jordan and Lucinda Drayton

Early morning sessions were workouts that provided opportunities to connect, to play, to have fun and quiet moments as well, accompanied by a variety of music that allowed participants to let go, explore and express themselves and communicate with others through movement.

The other breaks between the main sessions were mixtures of movement and music used in spontaneous and creative ways.