

Love for the Future: Being at Home on the Earth

Exploration Group

Session 2 – Travelling Light

The theme of this session is **simplicity** and **community**.

PREPARATION

Find a place to sit where you will not be disturbed for ten minutes or so. Sit upright and comfortably. This probably means having your feet squarely on the ground, your hands in your lap, and your head balanced at the top of your spine so that your neck muscles are not pulling in any direction to keep it upright.



Close your eyes and be aware of the sounds around you. If you can identify what they are, acknowledge that, but do not think about the cause. Just let there be a sea of sounds with you quietly in the centre of it.

Then pay attention to your breathing. Do not deliberately breathe any particular way. Just let it happen as it was before but pay attention to either the feel of the air coming in and out of your nose or mouth or to the movement of your abdomen as it moves in and out. Be aware of the air coming into you and going out again. Pay attention to this for several minutes.

While you are doing this your mind will wander. Perhaps to plans for what you must do later, or to remembering things that have happened. Or to things that might happen. Be aware of those thoughts, and the emotions that go with them, and gently bring your attention back to your breath.

It might help to set a timer, perhaps of ten minutes for the whole exercise. But not longer. Less would be fine. Then when the time is up open your eyes and pay attention for a few minutes to what you can see: looking for the colours, shapes and textures of the things before you.

Repeat this exercise on a number of occasions. You might find after a while that you find it easier to be still in other places, and to move into stillness for a few minutes on a bus or train, or at your desk or computer, developing a greater sense of being yourself: a person who has ideas, plans, worries, possessions and relationships, but is other than all those.

THEME: SIMPLICITY AND COMMUNITY

It would be interesting to know how many times in a day someone tries to persuade each of us to do something. It would also be impossible to work out.

There are obvious times at work when someone wants us to act in a particular way, or at home, if we live with someone else. Friends, family or neighbours might straightforwardly tell us what they think we ought to do or make subtle suggestions.

But then there are the adverts. They come at us on the TV or radio, they follow us around on the computer and surround us on hoardings, trains, buses, and the tube. And there are articles which aren't actually adverts but strongly suggest how we ought to look, or spend our time, or where we ought to go, or what we should do with our money.

It's like a flood that sweeps us along and living can easily be like thrashing in white water, trying not to go under. And as we and billions of others are swept into doing more and more and having more and more, the earth suffers.

Many teachers and writers in the past have spoken about simplicity. Simplicity is not naivety. A person who is being swept along by the currents of consumerism but thinks they are choosing their own lifestyle is being naive. A person who believes everything they read or hear is being naive. The word 'simplicity' has been used in the past to describe a way of life that is centred and not weighed down by unnecessary trappings, striving or guilt.

Simplicity is not something we can strive for. It is a gift. But we can do things which help us be open to receiving the gift. These involve stopping, and being where we are. Still. In the present moment and present to the world.

In preparation for the second session of this course there is a kind of exercise which many people find helps them to stop, and to be still. In recent years mindful meditation, or mindfulness, has helped many people to do this. It has come into the West from Buddhist practice and been adopted by many Christians as well as people of no religious tradition. But many of the practices are not unique to Buddhism and the aim of simplicity has long been considered a Christian virtue.

A short time of stillness, and of awareness of what our minds as well as our bodies are doing, is like a pause for breath. We cannot remain for ever, or even for long, in a state of isolated stillness. We also exist in a matrix of relationships with other people and with the whole living world. Our breath, which we might pay attention to in a period of meditation, is the air of the earth's atmosphere coming into us and the oxygen in it becoming a part of us. What we breathe out becomes a part of the atmosphere and then perhaps for a while a part of another living being. We are part of the living whole in the most basic way, through our breathing.

We are also linked with other people emotionally and mentally. We talk, we listen, we read, we text, we exchange ideas and information. Our moods are affected by what happens to them. There is no getting out of the stream.

But taking pauses, short times of stillness, can perhaps help us be aware of how we are influenced, and to assess the influences on us. And so, in the group work of this session we will think and talk about people who we reckon have influenced us for good.

READING

David Osborne, *Love for the Future: a journey* (Glasgow: Wild Goose, 2013) chapters 3 and 4

Richard Rohr, *Simplicity: The freedom of letting go* (New York: Crossroad, 2003)

Mark Williams and Danny Penman, *Mindfulness: a practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world* (London: Piatkus, 2011)

Eric Fromm, *To Have or to Be* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978)

GROUP MEETING

1. Review of Session 1

Does anyone have any thoughts, questions or reflections they would like to share with the group with regard to the themes of the last session: wonder and humility?

Has anyone made any adjustment to their life and routines as a result of the last session?

2. Introduction to theme: Simplicity and Community

(i) Who was able to do the preparation exercise? How did they find it?

(ii) If all the group members have read chapters 3 and 4 of the book *Love for the Future*, or the introduction above, move straight to (iii) If not, read through the introduction now.

(iii) Discuss any or all of the following:

- are members of the group clear how the term 'simplicity' is being used?
- does the theory make sense?
- if you have problems with the theory can you still run with it for now?
- what do you do that helps you still your mind?
- does anyone in the group deliberately practise mindful meditation or something similar?

3. Activity

1. Do not take this exercise too seriously! It is not an exercise in collective fine art or a drawing competition; and your drawing is not going to be marked like at school.

2. Near the centre of the paper draw a picture to represent each person in the group. You could each draw yourselves or simply draw a stick figure.

3. Then draw lines connecting each of the figures in the diagram.

4. Then in turn let each person in the group tell the others about someone who has influenced them for good. It might be anyone: a significant cultural figure, someone they have never met but who wrote a book or a song which has influenced them, or it might have been a childhood friend, a teacher, their grandmother or anyone else.

5. As each person contributes their part add these characters to the diagram, with another picture and line connecting them to the diagram of the speaker.

6. It may be that someone has mentioned a person who was also a good influence for someone else. In that case draw another line connecting these two.

7. When each person has described and drawn two or three people, as a group try to guess who might have influenced these people. And add them to the diagram.

8. There will come a point where you have run out of time or paper, or both. But that's enough. You have drawn a diagram of a very small part of a vast network of good influences in which you are caught up.

4. For the next session:

On a short journey pay attention to the people you pass or meet. What do you think they are feeling? How does their life seem to be for them? Speculate on where some of them might be coming from, and going to.

You may well be wrong but it helps you to remember that they have lives beyond the short time that they are near you. With their hopes, joys, pain and fears they too are part, with you, of the great network of life.

Discuss any questions or uncertainties about this exercise.

5. Close with a short contemplative practice

In silence, have a look again at the diagram you have drawn. Each person think quietly of the people they have identified who have influenced them for good, and how they did it. In silence, give thanks for them, and for others you now think of.

REFLECTION AFTER THE SESSION

Think about your weekly schedule and see whether you can build into it time and space for a stillness meditation, as well as contemplation and engagement. That might sound a lot but it would be possible to put them together. For example, by spending a few minutes being still, then looking at what is in front of you, noticing colours, shapes and movement, and then going for a short walk, being deliberately aware of the air on your hands and face, and maybe touching one or two things on the way. And, allowing a bit of extra time, the walk could even be a journey that you have to make anyway.

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