

## *From the Kitchen*

21 April 2010



I'm sitting here, exhausted, after completing four days of intensive work – mostly non-physical, but long hours of concentration and attention to detail and including a night away from home. The word 'exhaustion' is the one that rolled off the pen, but is it accurate?

What I'm actually feeling is much more complicated than that. Tiredness is mixed with relief, anticipation of a one-hour drive home, anticlimax at the task being complete and that the people I've been working with have left.

We let words like 'exhausted', 'ecstatic', 'happy', 'horrid' and the like roll off the tongue, often without thought of what we are truly experiencing or the real meaning of the words. We can also talk ourselves into a state of being by slapping a label on our essentially fleeting experiences. By telling myself I am exhausted, I can prolong the momentary experience and end up taking myself and my exhaustion to bed.

The same can happen with what could be momentary anger or upset. I label it as such and easily prolong it, instead of being open to whatever the next momentary experience might be. There is a certain comfort in smoothing out the vicissitudes of experience, although I suspect that letting go and riding the rollercoaster takes less energy and is more exciting. I know from my experience as a therapist that resisting the expression of what comes up at any moment locks something into our muscles somewhere, causing enervating tension. Each bit locked away makes the subsequent experiencing more difficult.

Not locking into the experience of a past moment takes awareness and attention to what is going on. It is simple but not easy. Our society is not designed, and most people unprepared, to have individuals 'be in the moment'. We are taught to 'put a brave face on it', to 'look on the bright side', to 'think positive', all of which teaches us to dissemble our feelings and our experiences.

I'm not suggesting we necessarily laugh, cry, mope, shout or giggle as the moment dictates, but to feel what is going on and at least acknowledge it to ourselves. We do not need to give every enquirer after our state of being an organ recital – a detailed inventory of our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. We can adopt an outer persona that sinks the external circumstances, such as work, while inwardly being honest about our momentary experiences.

When we watch children, we can see that humans are capable of living in the moment, moving seamlessly from joy to pain to stillness to anger to joy. Somewhere along the way – to a large extent at school – we learn to be less transparent and to put on a front. Social behaviour does need to be learned. However, not hitting someone when you're angry does not mean denying the anger. Children can be taught to allow their feelings without imposing them on others.

My fatigue, which I might have taken with me through the long drive home and then worn like a mantle to show off to the family, disappeared when I started writing. So did the anticipation and sense of anticlimax. A different energy started flowing through me as soon as I put pen to paper. I forgot to be a certain way and thus avoided getting stuck in a past experience. While I'm writing, I am freer to allow my thoughts and feelings to flow. It may be because writing is a creative activity and creativity needs that free flow.

I can feel the same when I'm wandering around with my camera, seeing the world differently; or when I'm walking the dog; or engrossed in a book. At those times, I forget myself and, in a strange way, remember who I truly am. There is no-one to impress or to display an attitude towards. I don't have to pretend. These are peaceful times. That I regard them as such, says something about all the other times.