

A message from ANSD President Robyn Fitzgerald

20 March 2020

Dear friends, blessings of love to each one of you at this most unprecedented time. As I write, human suffering and grief is mounting and borders, businesses and schools are closing. So many are worried. So many are afraid. With the full force of the coronavirus still unfolding, we wake knowing each new day will hold new uncertainties and unexpected change. The species that landed on the moon and split the atom has been brought to its knees by a few strands of RNA, something simpler than a single cell.

One of the truths of contemplative life is that far from being immune to life we are deeply, sensitively, present as we participate in life with our whole being. The Jewish mystic, Etty Hillesum, speaks to us of such presence and participation in these words that may be familiar to us:

Sunday morning prayer. Dear God, these are anxious times. Tonight for the first time, I lay in the dark with burning eyes as scene after scene of human suffering passed before me. I shall promise You one thing, God, just one small thing: I shall never burden my today with cares about my tomorrow, although that takes some practice. Each day is sufficient unto itself. I shall try to help you, God, to stop my strength ebbing away, though I cannot vouch for it in advance. But one thing is becoming clear to me: that You cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves. ¹

We feel Etty's "Here I am". We sense her vulnerability. Her eyes burn with the suffering she sees. Hers is a giving-over, an embodied communion with Presence awakening from within her fragility, which paradoxically, is infused with vitality and a quiet joy. We have a sense Etty is in labour, triaging her responses so as to be fully present to the birthing of something more from within the suffering. Meister Eckhart's words fit well here: "Here, in time, we are celebrating the eternal birth which God the Eternal bore and bears unceasingly in eternity, because this same birth is now born in time, in human nature."² Just as Etty is midwife and mother to the Word in her time, we too are being called to midwife and birth the Word in a new way in our time. As contemplatives, writes Beatrice Bruteau, to share in the divine life I must accept the vocation of consciously living in this self-creating universe".

It is also worth lingering with Etty's exclamation: "we must help You to help ourselves'. Teilhard de Chardin says something very similar: "God makes us make ourselves."³ Here, God is not an outsider, here to help, because there is no outside. No longer does Etty look outside herself to carry the burden of her anxiety and fear. Rather, she sees from within creative union with God. Here she is awakened by the light of true love dwelling within the centre of her heart – she *sees* from oneness even as she births oneness. ⁴

Like Etty, each one of us in this beautiful community of ANSD is deeply attuned to all that is happening, and is choosing to participate in the birthing of a new consciousness of creative union and oneness. With this immense inner resource already stable and strong, how shall we see from

¹ *An Interrupted Life: Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum 1941-43*, Persephone Books, London, 165.

² *The Complete Works of Meister Eckhart*, Sermon One, Crossroad Publishing, New York, 2009, 29.

³ Beatrice Bruteau, *The Grand Option: Personal Transformation and a New Creation*. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 2007, 84.

⁴ Kerrie Hide, "Seeing from Oneness", *Coolamon*, Spring, 2018, 16

this place as a community? And how can support each other in this movement? We would love to hear your thoughts.

Last Friday, our ANSD community gathered for healing meditation for those impacted by coronavirus. For an hour, we connected heart centre to heart centre, awakening from within our communal heart, healing, solidarity and communal consciousness. In our silence we were supported and joined by members of AECSD, CSD, Companions, CEN (the Contemplative Evolution Network) the Sisters of Mercy and many others, revealing to us the creative way networks can work. As we move into the solitude of 'isolation', we are being offered a rare opportunity to continue to meet in this way, to discover that we are truly living in the hearts of each other and to cultivate communal consciousness. The coronavirus is showing us the power of small things to change the whole. We hope you will be able to join us in the weeks ahead. Details are on the ANSD website and please invite others to join us.

In the light of the overwhelming response to the meditation, the healing meditations will continue every Friday through to the end of April and we would love as many of you as are able, to join us. Recordings of the meditations will be made available on the ANSD website, along with the *contemplatio* prayer generously prepared each week by Dr Kerrie Hide and which form the basis of the healing meditation as each week unfolds. We are grateful as well to Rev. Susanna Pain and Trish Watts for the beautiful sung blessing on our community at the end of each meditation. Our hope is the prayers and recordings will be shared freely.

As we move into deeper solitude over these next few weeks and possibility months, many ANSD retreats, conversations and events will now be offered online. Recordings will be made available to members as they become available. We will stay in communication with members about this.

It is so important for us to continue to find ways to express contemplative insights in response to the awakening of new consciousness in this profound and sacred time. In these weeks of greater solitude ahead, we invite you to consider writing something for *Coolamon*, our online journal, and vessel for holding our communal wisdom. Now more than ever, the wisdom of our national spiritual direction community is crucial for articulating insights birthed from this amazing time that are relevant to our practice. The *Coolamon* team will be grateful to receive your writings, poetry, photography and artwork. On this, special thanks to Margaret Wesley for her gifting as the founding editor who has now decided to hand over the baton. We are delighted that Sally Longley has agreed to assume this role, working alongside Kathy Cave, Kylie Burgess and Brian Holliday our founding team members. I encourage you to contact Sally with ideas, feedback and if you would like to be involved with the work of *Coolamon*: editor.ansdjournal@gmail.com

These past few weeks, ANSD executive have been present to the work of ANSD in ways I do not think any of us imagined we would be called. I would like to thank each member for your constant presence, support and love. Please pray for the executive and let us pray for one another in the days, weeks and months ahead.

Blessings and love

Robyn