

Workshop Report.

Workshop : 7 Day Silent Retreat with Catherine Ingram

October 24-31th 2014

I recently attended the above workshop with 21 participants, among them several other IAHIP psychotherapists, and while this is an unusual workshop to report on for Inside Out, I would argue that the radical difference involved may make it interesting for us psychotherapists who use speech so centrally as part of our work, to consider the value of silent retreats as part of our self-care practices.

Catherine Ingram is a world renowned Spiritual teacher and author who has been leading this type of workshop for over 20 years.

The workshops take place in locations of beauty where comfort, great food and astatically pleasing surroundings are a core part of the workshop. The structure of the week ,which is very spacious, involves two one and a half hour group discussion sessions where participants report on their meditative and process experience and are guided to engaging in deeper presence by Catherine. There are also two yoga sessions per day with poetry, group walks and lots of relaxation time. All activities are optional and all present are silent at all times ,including meal times, except for group discussion sessions.

In the first day or two it is remarkable how tired people are ,often sleeping or resting for many hours between sessions, showing as Catherine says the speed and demand of most of our lives- a speed we are often unaware of until we avail of this kind of opportunity to rest deeply. As the days go on one could see how more rested and indeed younger participants were looking. This shows me how what we usually call relaxation is often merely replacing one kind of speedy demand with another, in our manic lives.

It was also clear how less cluttered participants minds became , how held feelings were released and how playful and childlike people became –a kind of return to natural childlike innocence emerged as we slowed down and came into a deeper sense of presence and ease.

In this context it was then possible for participants to explore life issues in a serene way allowing their own intuitive wisdom to emerge, with no attempt to fix anything. Issues from family and work contexts emerged and were met as were major existential issues of meaning, death and purpose and these could be explored in a radical and spacious way.

This was not a self-improvement programme, it did not attempt to have participants believe any creed or belief structure, nor was it a mindfulness or meditation teaching. The invitation was to return to a deeper sense of presence, where pleasure, quietness and gratitude could spontaneously emerge, and the silence did the work as Catherine would often say. The return to deeper sensual awareness where nature, others and self could be met in a new way was touching.

For psychotherapists who spend many hours with clients in psychological suffering this was a great treat. To be able to bask in silence, beauty and the love that opens in hearts relieved of pressure stress and demand was profound.

I would strongly recommend this type of workshop as a most valuable CPD experience for practitioners, from beginning ones grappling with developing appropriate compassion and empathic attunement to seasoned psychotherapists battling with vicarious traumatisation or burnout this may be of great benefit.

For further information on future retreat workshops see www.catherineingram.com, and also her book *Passionate Presence* Harper Collins 2003

Or contact Ger Murphy at germurphy@edgeworth.ie