

Corona 2020

The Year of Perfect Vision

As far as I have ever considered that I may have a 'mission statement' as an Osteopath, then I would think that Dr Still's instruction to 'Find the Health' would be it.

Before I proceed then, to tell you about the ways this extra ordinary year of 2020 and the advent of the Corona virus have enabled me to fulfil this directive, let me first say very clearly that I am fully aware that this is a time of great suffering for many people. I am aware of the huge increase in food bank usage, of lay-offs, unemployment, collapsing economies, rapidly dwindling savings and hunger. I am aware of the global fears and anxiety, of the frictions caused by family members unused to spending so much time together being cooped up in tiny airless spaces for days and weeks on end. I am aware of the teenage boy who had recently revealed to his highly religious parents that he was gay and now finds himself shut away with them, with nowhere to go whilst his mother prays out loud for him to be 'cured'. I am aware that there are people, right now, gravely ill, many dying in hospitals around the world and that this will continue for some time to come.

One of our friends on a yoga retreat in India has found herself trapped there. There are no repatriation flights, there is no food to buy and the locals have turned against the tourists, attacking them with sticks for bringing the virus into the country and 'stealing' their food. Stray and starving dogs roam the streets in packs biting anyone who goes out. She has just discovered a close relative is seriously ill in a U.K. hospital with Corona but as yet she has no idea of when she may be able to get home to visit or if visiting is even possible. A close friend of mine is currently dying of a long standing heart condition. The chances are none of us will be able to attend his funeral; none of us will be there say 'Good Bye' to such a beloved companion. I am no stranger to these facts but I am also aware of a whole other side to this Corona coin.

Before I'd heard the word 'Corona' in relationship to a virus it meant, to me, beer or a ring of bright light around an object, a halo of light. Before there was any mention of a virus at all it was New Year and 2020 was just beginning. 'Twenty twenty' the cardinal sign of perfect vision. That was what 2020 would be for me and hopefully for all of us, a chance for the scales to fall from our eyes and to see this world and our place in it with renewed clarity. We were all aware of the environmental disaster that was looming, of Brexit fatigue, of the rain, overflowing rivers, flooding.....we all knew that 'something had to be done' but what and how? That was how 2020 began.

Then, suddenly, almost out of the blue, Corona came. Suddenly unprecedented things started to happen. Schools across the Country closed for the foreseeable future, flights and

airports closed down, roads, streets and shops emptied. What would have taken the combined forces of Extinction Rebellion, David Attenborough, Greta Thunberg, Greenpeace and the worlds' Governments a decade to coordinate happened in days. The skies cleared, the air cleared, stars were brighter and the bird song louder. In China 20 times more people lived because of the reduction in atmospheric pollution than were dying from Corona (Marshall Burke, Stanford University scientist reported in USA Today 14.03.2020).

Communities were coming together, neighbours shopping for each other. At 8.00pm on March 26th there was a nationwide round of applause in appreciation of the NHS, the day before that 400,000 people had volunteered their services to hospitals and G.P. surgeries. Clearly there were many silver linings to this Corona cloud. To me, it seemed not only was the cleaner air helping us to see better but we were simply seeing what truly mattered more clearly. Our jaded, rather selfish attitudes disappeared like a cataract under a laser as we began to see our friends, family, work colleagues and community in a whole new light. We, as a collective, were all in it together; indeed the whole world was in it together. Boundaries and grievances dissolved as we understood that the virus, in the age of international flight, was no respecter of political or geographical affiliations. We may have been separated by Social Distancing but in many ways were brought closer together by the very same thing.

However, where was the silver lining in this Corona cloud for Osteopaths when our practices were closing, patient lists shrank and our incomes slashed?

Let's go back to Dr A.T. Still. Firstly, he was no stranger to epidemics. In 1863 four of his children died from spinal meningitis within a fortnight of each other, a level of bereavement unimaginable to almost all of us. His faith was shattered and he ceased to practise. Then, a neighbour came to him, desperate, begging him to help his dying 8 year old daughter. The two men had held a long grudge but the neighbour, in tears, implored Still saying, 'let bygones go and come with me'. Dr Still, also moved to tears forgave the man and went to treat the girl who was saved. Whilst this situation is way beyond what most of us will ever be asked to do, it is an example of what we can all do. We can all have our faith restored. We can all forgive and be forgiven. We can all volunteer our services and share our skills. In grief Still had separated himself from his community, he was healed by being restored to it. Isn't that what is happening to us? Isn't our faith in human nature being restored as we move from the self of individualism to the Self as a member of Humanity? Isn't the light around the Corona virus illuminating a new pathway for us just as the light that followed Still's grief inspired him to see a school, a teaching, a science called Osteopathy?

What pathway is unfolding for you during this time? What pathway for all of us as Osteopaths? What would Still do now, or Sutherland?

Dr Still, the respecter of Health rather than disease certainly taught his students to work with highly contagious illness. He even instructed his own son, Charley, to work on the victims of the Diphtheria epidemic in Red wing Minnesota. The infection had a mortality

rate of up to 50% claiming on average one fatality a day. In today's parlance the town was in lockdown. On many front doors were quarantine notices saying, 'Keep out! By order of the State Board of Health - Contagious Diphtheria.' No doubt this would have frightened off many of us but Dr. Still sent in his son, even though Charley had never treated a case of Diphtheria before in his life. Charley was thrown in at the deep end and spent the entire night with the family of 5 sick children and a dying servant girl. He said later, 'I worked with those children all night, I was afraid to quit treating'. By morning all patients were on the road to recovery.

What will you say if this Corona epidemic goes down in history along with the Spanish flu of 1919, or the 1854 Cholera outbreak in London's Broad Street and someone says to you, 'What did you do during the Corona outbreak of 2020?' Heaven forbid with examples like that of our founding Father we say, 'Well I sat at home on the sofa watching Box sets and waiting for things to go back to normal'.

So, you may well ask, 'Mary, what have you done'?

Well, I've tried to follow my Osteopathic Mission Statementto 'Find the Health' and the first place I started to look was within myself. What does it mean to find the Health? To me it means to find within that which goes beyond, as Still put it, 'material forces or physical derangements that generate disorder'. To me it means to go within, to find stillness, peace and the glimmer of liquid light. To Still it meant to find the 'Immutable Truth underlying the cause and cure of disease'.

Still realised that before he had been able to see this internal spark of Health he had unconsciously absorbed a world view that insidiously shaped his thoughts and actions, a belief system that upheld a set of material values that were based on controlling Nature, rather than harmonising with its inherent wisdom. As he relinquished these world views, so the Immutable Truth became more visible to him. How many of us have put our inherent belief in our right to control Nature ahead of our own (and Nature's) inherent wisdom? How many of us have called on the Natural World and its Dynamic Stillness as we look to the horizon and await the Tide to help treat our patients but have no qualms about damaging that very same Natural world by eating palm oil or flying or ...the list goes on and on.

Suddenly the year of the 2020 Corona pandemic was the year for me to go within, to find the Health and to completely reassess my relationship with the natural worldand then I realised that the whole natural world and lots of the people in it seemed to be assisting me! What would it look like if I were to wish for a forty day Spiritual Retreat that I could spend in the comfort of my own home and garden and which the Government would partly fund? What would it feel like if all the world said they would help me by clearing my list of patients and being quiet and still? If they all agreed to stop driving around and empty the roads so I could be meditative as I walked the lanes and cycled the canal footpath? How grateful would I be if everyone in the whole world said they would stop flying so the sky

could heal and the air could clear? How moved would I be if my fellow citizens rallied to the call of the doctors and nurses who like Charley, have been sent in to treat dying children night after night with no previous experience?well readers... it's happened and not just to me, we have all been given a similar opportunity.

Like a miracle, my wildest wish has been granted.....everyone IS being stilled, I have days ahead of me in which I can go within and discover Health and guess what, that Health is shared by all of us. If one of us finds it, we light a penny candle in the dark for many as yet unknown to us. Far from this being a selfish journey, the more of us who find the spark of Health the easier it is for the rest of us. It's the most beautiful act of communion, of community, of Humanity.

But, there is more....even more than my wildest dream coming true.....we are being hugely assisted by the Natural World herself.

If I asked, 'How would you find the spark of health in your patient, osteopathically?' you may well say that you would do an EV4 or a CV4 and there would be an ignition. You would have brought the whole mechanism to a point of profound stillness and silence until there was a deep inhalation andlight!

If we were to ask, 'How could the Natural world, of which we are an integral, interwoven part, assist in our collective healing?' I wonder if the answer may be that She would contrive to bring us all to a point of profound stillness and silence until there was a deep inhalation and the light of ignition, of renewed vision?

What if this Corona cloud truly has a silver lining and there is a kindness to it? What if we are all on this healing journey together and the natural world with its' inherent wisdom is our Osteopath, our Healer?

One of my insightful patients suggested that the panic buying so rife in those initial weeks may have been the subconscious buying of provisions, just as we would do before setting off on a journey. Did we perhaps subconsciously realise that we were all, collectively, about to go on a journey, possibly the most important journey of them all, the journey within, the journey into the halo of light that is The Immutable Health?

Each morning I get up and look out of the window at a world that is getting more still and more silent by the day. It is a Dynamic Stillness and the most vibrant silence I have ever heard. My sense is that Mother Nature, the Mother of all Osteopaths, is treating us right now. The sky, the air, the birds, the wind and rain, our pets and livestock, the wild creatures and the sea creaturesperhaps they are all helping? Human beings are an indivisible part of the Natural World and yet we often see ourselves as separate from it. My sense is that as the whole world is being stilled so we are being awoken to our part in its collective wholeness. Mother Nature and her natural world around us are giving us an opportunity to

find stillness and peace. It's like a big hug and a CV4 combined. What could follow but a deep breath in and a spark of renewed Health and Wholeness?

Which is all very well and good but life in the 'real' world is going on too and we have a duty not just to be treated but to treat, a duty to help and to care. We have families, friends, patients, many at an unreachable distance. What do we DO? What can we do?

Well, we can trust in the Tide to guide us but even the Tide needs something to work with. So, after we have gone within to find the health in ourselves, then we can put ourselves 'out there' and contact our patients, neighbours, colleagues by phone, email or letter offering advice and support, always with the view that we are looking for the light of Health rather than supporting the fear of disease. Perhaps we may be guided to care for our family and children rather than patients. Perhaps we become a home schooling teacher or a delivery driver or a stay at home carer, a gardener, or a carer for the creatures. However, whatever we choose to do or are guided to do, we always do it with the Osteopathic awareness of Wholeness and Light and Love. Even the Social Separation can be osteopathic and healing if you tune into your own Fluid body/Zone B. Simply feel the bubble of light, warmth and comfort around you and then become aware of the same bubble around everyone else. You'll never invade anyone else's space and even better, you will help your fellow shopper or pedestrian awaken to their own bubble of support. After a while you'll feel naked if you go out without it!

So let's use this gift of time and stillness wisely. We are being supported and guided on this journey by the Breath of Life as it arises from the Dynamic Stillness of the Natural World.

If we are asked, 'What did you do in the Corona Year of 2020?' let's not say we got bored or frightened on the sofa, let's say we held hands in our collective heart and went on the journey of a lifetime and that our eyes were opened with 2020 vision.

Mary Bolingbroke

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Acknowledgment: John Lewis. '*A. T. Still: From the Dry Bone to the Living Man.*' 2012. Dry Bone Press.