

Season of Soul (Part 1) Week Beginning April 20th 2014

I went alone to see the Palme d'Or-winning film *Amour*. I knew I would cry. Watching the relentless stripping away of an aging Parisian couple's energy to love each other was deeply moving. It raised the most sensitive issues about how we see loss, love and hope in raw detail in the most extreme circumstances. The cinema was utterly still when the credits ended.

Why was this, I wondered? Because, I suspect, we had been taken to the place of our souls, to that land where our deepest spirit lives – a land we are slow to enter. The context of our lives mitigates against such profound awareness of mystery. Too much unhappiness, anger, betrayal, fear and an existential and stressful urgency are filling our days and nights.

It takes great courage to set about regaining the lost rhythm of the soul. We generally postpone the work of self-realisation, of the inner journey, of the ultimate questions. Committed to a shallow agenda, we do not live at our deepest truth. We forget that if we do not live our lives abundantly now, we never will. and as death approaches we bitterly regret the greatest tragedy of all – our un-lived lives. W.H. Auden writes,

*We would rather be ruined than changed,
We would rather die in our dread
Than climb the cross of the moment
And let our illusions die.*

We need to keep re-setting our spiritual compass so as to discern and painstakingly follow the innate, intimate longing with which we were born. Half-hearted hankerings after happiness won't do. Stifled though it may be, somewhere within us there is always a half-remembered memory of the way forward; we sense a vaguely familiar blueprint too often out of focus. it is hard to find words for this echo, this stirring, this blurred star that persistently attempts to draw, drive and sustain us, that reminds us of our true north, even while we fall back into the allurements of lesser lights and loves in the process.

The journey of a soul is never clear, direct or final. It tests our commitment to the limit. But distracted and confused as we mostly are, the original design is never lost. It spills through the cracks of our daily distractions, but it never drains away completely. Author Sheila Cassidy wrote:

*And so we must begin to live again,
We of the damaged bodies and assaulted minds,
Starting from scratch with the rubble of our lives
And picking up the dust
Of dreams once dreamt.*

The required 'picking up' is no armchair rumination, no vague desire to be better. There is no self-help shortcut to the place of this emerging and radical vision. Old and shallow patterns of existence,

of perceiving who we are, have to die for something beautiful to be born. It is not about proving, improving or accumulating anything anymore. Nor is it about discovering some glorious plan or direction to navigate the labyrinths of the soul. The truth of it is all so different. It is only through the hard and slow way of surrender, of unlearning, of reaching, through meditation, for T.S. Eliot's 'condition of simplicity that costs not less than everything' that the veils begin to part. Only then, beyond looking, can we learn to see. Only then, beyond knowing, can we learn to be wise. Only then can we commit to a life of compassion, contemplation and creativity.

(from 'Treasured and Transformed', published March 2014)