

EDITORIAL

A picture paints a thousand words, and can spark off a thousand associations. A figure stands on top of a mountain and shouts 'what is spirituality!!' (Leviston). The question is posed to rock and snow and empty air, amid the silence of the high places, reminding us perhaps that spirituality itself inhabits a place beyond definition.

The simple drawing brings other things to mind; a line from a poem by Nan Shepherd, in which she describes a 'licht amo' the hills' and says that if that light were ever to go out, the world would indeed fall into darkness. Spirituality as the 'licht amo' the hills'? Not always light, though, as those of us engaged in chaplaincy well know. Spirituality, the journey, the struggle, can be experienced and lived out in dark places, places of loneliness, terror, anger and physical extremity. Again I am reminded of climber Joe Simpson's book 'Touching the Void' in which he recounts his own struggle to survive abandonment on an Andean mountain face, and how, during that time of awfulness, he met depths in himself which left him changed. Peter Speck reminds us that spiritual care depends on patient and caregiver entering together into the experience, and mutually exploring the terrain 'without quite knowing where it will lead'. That territory can be bleak and challenging indeed, and may be a place where both parties risk touching some void of their own.

Returning to the figure on the mountain peak, I am also reminded of transfiguration, and of how our mountain top experiences, great or terrible, must

continue to nourish and inform what we do when we come back from the silence to the world of words, of work, of relationships and practicalities. Part of the task of chaplaincy is to translate spirituality, with all its welter of meaning, into spiritual care – meaningful, relevant, earthed; to enshrine it (not reduce or confine it) within operational policies; to find ways of providing evidence that it is happening, and of monitoring and assessing its quality. Contributors to the latest edition of the journal give us an insight into this ongoing work. Themes in common include the healing of false dualisms and dichotomies, leading to a new complementarity and partnership in healthcare, and the need to address the tendencies within the culture of healthcare to depersonalise and compartmentalise that which should be whole, human and together. Articles range from the search for a theological method and underpinning for chaplaincy, to the precision of assessment and audit of chaplaincy services; from work informed by a profound pastoral sensitivity, and the hopefulness symbolised by the emergence of spring flowers, to the playful and childlike suggestiveness of the cartoon.

It's all here, and I hope you enjoy it.

References

- SHEPHERD NAN ' *O licht amo' the Hills*' in Bateman, M et al. (2000) *Scottish Religious Poetry*. Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh.
- SIMPSON, J (2004) *Touching the Void*. Vintage. London.