

EDITORIAL

This edition begins and ends with reflections on the asking of questions. In his 'Therapeutic Role of Spirituality in Psychotherapy', Professor Griffith provides examples of the kinds of questions which might enable the psychotherapist to gain insight into a client's spiritual life and to explore its therapeutic potential. Those of us in chaplaincy will doubtless be familiar with the asking of such questions – concerning hope, love, meaning and purpose – and with the posture of careful listening which we must adopt as we seek to approach a person's 'core sense of identity'. Again, in his Orere source, Noel Brown also reflects on the asking of questions, reminding us that 'the most powerful questions are not those which seek information, but which invite people to re-examine some aspect of their life or faith.'

Yet there are those for whom the questions no longer make as much sense as they once did. People with dementia may well live with an impaired ability to understand the questions, the words, the invitation to reflect or to re-examine. Some may inhabit a realm altogether beyond the asking and the answering. What of their spiritual lives? Stephen Smith focuses upon this aspect of the palliative care of people with dementia, and describes how he approached the task of identifying spiritual need. He talks about the need to connect – 'with people, things, the world, the past, deeply held views and beliefs.' I am reminded of Robert Davis' account of his own 'journey into Alzheimer's disease' in which he describes the terror of feeling dis-connected from all that had once been familiar, even from the God who had hitherto sustained him at the deepest level. Connectedness, community, relationship: these surely belong at the heart of a spirituality which does not depend upon the ability to think, reason or

understand. As James Griffith says elsewhere, '(Spirituality) places relationships at the centre of awareness.' It seems to me that this holding-within-relationship is the core task of caring spiritually for people with dementia. This is a challenge both professional and emotional.

Most of us will not suffer from dementia, but all of us, if we live long enough, will have to face up to the ageing process. What will we, and society, make of it? Will it confront us with a crisis of meaning, or provide us with the opportunity for acceptance, integration and spiritual growth? Harriet Mowat makes the case that ageing is a spiritual journey, and that the search for meaning in ageing is fundamentally a spiritual task. W B Yeats wrote in his 'Sailing to Byzantium'

*'an aged man is but a paltry thing,
a tattered coat upon a stick, unless
soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
for every tatter in its mortal dress.'*

The spiritual task of ageing is to balance 'immortality and imminence' and through realism, hopefulness and self transcendence, to enable that song of the soul to be heard.

This edition of the journal offers a varied and stimulating range of contributions, and with the above observations, I commend it to you.

DAVIS, R(1993) *My Journey into Alzheimer's Disease*. Scripture press Foundation(uk)
GRIFFITH, JL & ME (2002) *Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy*. Guilford Press.