

Create Space V Retreat - 22nd to 25th April 2010

Mill Retreat Centre, Picardy and Normandy - a report from Tony



What a wonderful few days. After so many years of happy retreats at Duncton Mill, we were all a bit apprehensive as to whether it was going to be as good at the Mill Retreat Centre. The verdict was that although different it has even more to offer.



Heather, Kevan and I drove over on the Wednesday to get everything set up. We were approaching Dover, I received a call from Ed my son-in-law to say that my daughter Elsa had gone into labour a week early. As we arrived at the Mill I received another call with the sound of my first grand child, Tensie (formally Ortensia Annabelle Margaret) in the background. Mother and baby are doing well. Dad sounded a bit stressed. But as he had been stuck in Berlin due to the ash cloud and Elsa went into labour 90 minutes after he arrived home it is understandable.

What a wonderful start to the retreat. And what an experience when I first got to cuddle her. She is soooo cute.

We'd had all got together to share transport. Most drove via the Dover to Calais ferry which is the cheapest route although the tunnel is a bit quicker and Newhaven to Dieppe is less driving. Quite a few people caught early ferries on Thursday so they could travel via the picturesque port and resort of Le Treport at the mouth of the river Bresle. As well as being a pretty place to walk around it has a superb range of fish restaurants. So after a leisurely lunch they drove down the beautiful Bresle valley to the Mill.



We held the briefing on the veranda bathed in light from the sun setting over the lake with the words of William Blake's poem, Eternity, around the walls behind us:



*He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise.*

Barbara Boxall of Stillness Retreats introduced the Mill pointing out that we were sat in Picardy but across the river, the lake was in Normandy. Heather went through the programme and I said a few words on the walks and guided meditation. We handed out a worksheet for attendees to record what they learnt through the weekend with a few specific questions.

Heather's Thursday evening Yoga class was quite gentle as everybody had had a long days travelling and we were then certainly ready for the first of Julie's wonderful vegetarian meals with mainly organic products many sourced from local farmers. The dining room looks like it is straight out of a Monet painting. This is where our Karma Yoga started as we took it in turns in groups of four to lay the table, serve the food, clear up afterwards and make sure everything was cleaned and put away. Many hands make light work as well as a very sociable activity. Then it was time to sit by the huge fire place with a coffee or tea to have a chat and relax before Heather lead us through evening meditation and visualisation.



Each morning started with me ringing the gong to wake everybody up followed by Heather leading meditation to the light of candles and the sound of birds singing with the occasional moo from a cow on the next door farm. It was so tranquil. As the sky



brightened we started our Yoga class so by the time the sun rose and filled the valley with light we were doing our sun salutations. The Yoga room is spacious and with so many skylights on both sides it gets wonderful light all day long. After an invigorating Yoga class we were ready for breakfast.

After breakfast on Friday and Saturday morning and Friday afternoon I had pre-arranged some guided walks around the Bresle Valley for those that wanted them. Others were content to relax in the garden, by the lake or find themselves a quiet spot in the Mill or 30 acres of grounds.

Each walk rose out of the valley through woods, farmland and pretty villages passing a wealth of wild flowers with stops to try and identify a bird's song, spot a deer bounding through the woods or stroke a donkey. The woods are mainly of beech so the undergrowth is low. The sun shining through the canopy on to the new growth was beautiful.



Evenings started with a Yoga class followed by dinner and evening nidra & meditation.



On Saturday Pat Cronin facilitated a very involving workshop on the 8 Steps of Yoga starting from the Bhagavad-Gita and the Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. As well as providing a clear and concise explanation of what is obviously a very deep subject, Pat got us all thinking when she broke us up into teams for the exercises discussing the Yamas (restraints) and Niyamas (observances).

After lunch on Saturday I provided an introduction to Walking Meditation with an explanation of the principles showing how they built on the theory Pat had provided. We then went off to put it into practice by doing a silent walking meditation around the lake. Afterwards everyone found their own space to contemplate on what they had learnt through the process.





We had heard that there were otters in the lake and had caught occasional glimpses of a brown but unrecognisable animal in the water. I decided that having just finished the walking meditation I was in the best mental state to find the otters. I set off around the lake with Heather's camera. Sure enough I found a pair of otters swimming near the bank. The smaller one (female ?) went under the bank. The larger one (male ?) looked straight at me

before swimming from left to right, right to left, away from me and then directly towards me. I took photos of him in every position. Then he looked up at me again, so I said Namaste and thanked him, after which he dived under the water. What an experience.

Later Pawel, who had taken a key role in the restoration of the Mill building and grounds and now looks after the site showed us the work he is doing to restore the mill wheel itself. It is a quite unusual design and, from the research that he and owner Kolinka have undertaken, appears to be as efficient as a modern one. They aim to install a generator driven by the mill to provide electricity. It will certainly end up as a net contributor to the grid.



There was plenty of time to relax. Some people took the boat out and rowed around the lake with its varied wild fowl and fish. Early one morning a colourful streak across the bows revealed a Kingfisher at full tilt. The swans glided gracefully around whilst the Coots squabbled and the Mallards looked after their young. Occasionally the herons would swoop and perch motionless until ready to strike.

Others did a bit of Tai Chi on the island between the River Bresle and the mill leat, helped Barbara with the garden or cooled their feet off in the Bresle.



Saturday evening finished with all of us gathered around the bonfire to chant the Gayatri Mantra, release a Chinese lantern, chat, relax and dance.





On Sunday morning after our meditation and Heather taking us through a rather more challenging Yoga class we were treated to two workshops. Firstly Mike Murphy provided an introduction to Kinesiology. This is the science of muscle testing to find energy imbalances within the body. Any imbalances found by the Kinesiologist are corrected by using a combination of therapeutic massage, nutritional supplements and other powerful techniques to relieve mental/emotional stresses. Mike also demonstrated the effects of sensitivity to particular foods. He related the history of kinesiology and its basis in Chinese acupuncture and a body's energy field. He then linked it forward to quantum physics. We were struck by how complimentary it was to Yoga and how some of the concepts were so similar yet had quite different origins.

The second workshop was from Pat and Heather on The Four Paths of Yoga:
Karma Yoga – the yoga of action, the path of selfless service
Bhakti Yoga – the yoga of devotion
Raja Yoga – the yoga of mind control, the scientific approach
Jnana Yoga – the yoga of knowledge, the philosophical approach
They explained each path and how some people may specialise in one but how you need an element of each one to provide a complete approach to Yoga.

Eva presented Heather with a collage of photos from all the retreats we had held at Duncton Mill. It finished with a photo of the Mill Centre to provide the link to our new beginnings. This was admired by all and triggered the odd nostalgic tear.



Then after lunch, completing the feedback sheets, handing out certificates and a final group photo we all took our farewells before making our way home. After each retreat we think it can't get better than this, but somehow it does.

Thank you so much Barbara, Julie, Pawal and Otta (the dog) for your welcoming kindness and enthusiasm. We would also like to thank all participants for sharing your spirit so generously and enabling us all to create our own space in this Picardy/Normandy haven.

Namaste
Tony

