

Discovering Unity

Six-month Intensive Winter Retreat at the Chisholme Institute

We now welcome enquiries and applications for the winter retreat proposed for 2016/17

Introduction

A six-month intensive retreat course in knowing the self, loving the other and serving the one.

This course takes the unity of the human reality as the starting point; it is therefore open to all who wish to discover this unity, and so to engage more fully with its unlimited potential. It is a course designed to set free from habitual thinking and limiting beliefs our capacity for wonder and for love.

What it means to be human will be studied and contemplated in depth throughout. Certain personal, social and global issues will be examined in the light of this study, and we will consider the possibility of a transformation in consciousness with regard to our future, and place in the world. Thus the course will directly address the relationship between self-knowledge and global responsibility that ensues when we acknowledge there is no ultimate distinction between our being and the being of everything else.

In the same light, we will approach service to humanity, in whatever sphere, from the perspective of self-knowledge. We will also look carefully at what is entailed in real service, paying particular attention to clarity of purpose and intention.

With the help of some of the greatest teachers, in particular Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi, our shared humanity will be explored in depth. And we will see where we still need to grow and develop in order to realise our potential.

Every day theory and practice will be combined. There is work to be done, with the mind, with the body and for the heart. Throughout the six months we will cultivate awareness of what is happening in the instant, and so enter more deeply into conscious and compassionate relation to ourselves, to others and to the world.

The root premise of this course is the fundamental unity of all existence, through which all things are already naturally interconnected, and from which our wholeness comes as a gift.

Above all, we will contemplate love as the principle and cause of all movement.

The Chisholme Institute

Chisholme has been running residential six-month retreats for the last forty years. The education offered here is not tied to any particular religious or spiritual tradition but is based on the principle of unity found at the heart of all traditions.

The Course

This is a fully residential and immersive retreat. The timetable is divided into periods dedicated to study, work and contemplative and devotional practice. The aim is to provide an opportunity for students to experience these as an integrated whole: work as devotion, study as contemplation etc.

You will spend most of the time together as a group in study or work, but there will also be some periods of private study and personal contemplation.

Study and conversation allow us to explore in depth our shared humanity with the help of some of the finest spiritual literature. We meet in the round with an emphasis on relating the principles with our actual human experience, as well as developing a solid intellectual grasp of the key ideas.

Work is an opportunity for contemplative action and service as well as for discovering new skills and ways of working together. You may work in the walled vegetable garden, the house, kitchen, or the estate woodlands; wherever the need arises. The work will consist of fulfilling the needs of the day-to-day, as well as special projects.

Contemplative and devotional practices cultivate our conscious engagement with every aspect of our lives, where constancy of awareness is the aim. Meditation frees us from the entanglements of mental habit and attachment in order to give space to see things as they really are. An eight-week mindfulness course will be incorporated within the first three months, and throughout the course the element of bodywork (eg. Qi Gong, Yoga) will be approached as a contemplative discipline.

Devotional practices cultivate compassion and qualities of heart. These, including *zikr*, are largely drawn from the Sufi tradition and include practices specifically recommended by Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, who was known as the 'Greatest Teacher' within this tradition.

Materials

The first three months will focus on the core metaphysical principles of unity, and aim to establish a strong foundation in these. Materials studied are drawn from different sources, traditions and approaches to truth: from the mystical, to unitive enquiry in science and the arts. This allows us to consider Ibn 'Arabi, Rumi, Lao Tsu and the Bhagavad Gita in the same context as Einstein, Rembrandt and other examples from contemporary culture. Non-textual sources including audio, video, images and perceptual exercises will also be employed.

The primary text of the second three months of study is Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam*. This work summarises the entire Abrahamic spiritual tradition in a unique overview of human potential and realisation, tracing the course of spiritual evolution as exemplified in the line of prophets from Adam to Muhammed.

During the course there will be a diverse programme of talks and seminars with guest speakers. Through presentations from specific disciplines we broaden the unitive perspective, towards an all-inclusive point of view.

Facilitation

A number of facilitators will accompany the students during the course. There may be times, in work, study and contemplation, where guidance and instruction is given; however, the emphasis throughout is on your own learning through experience and putting insights into practice.

You will be offered a private meeting with a facilitator each week, at which you can raise any personal matters and questions. A student support coordinator will also meet the student body at times during the course.

Note about commitment and intention

This is a full-time retreat course running seven days a week for six months, with no 'free time'.

By honouring the intention behind the course the participants create a subtle container which holds and carries them through the six months.

In this spirit students are asked to refrain from any activity that would compromise the intention and benefits of the retreat atmosphere, including the overuse of digital technology. This includes limiting absences from the course, and personal visitors to only those essential for medical or family reasons.

The intention and commitment that each student brings to the retreat will affect the whole, and before committing you are asked to consider carefully your personal and life circumstances, and reflect upon what might interfere with or affect your full participation. Please include any such factors in the relevant section on your application form.

The Location

Learning at Chisholme is not limited to the study or meditation rooms: the entire place – woodlands, garden, kitchen, etc – provides the context for this retreat to happen. Surrounded on all sides by moorland, pastures and forest, the Chisholme estate is a place of great beauty, wholly dedicated to our awakening to the beauty of all existence.

Student facilities

Accommodation is in a converted farm steading block; rooms are simple, comfortable and beautiful. Rooms are shared unless there are medical or other reasons why a single room is required. The steading block has a common room with facilities for making tea and coffee and a payphone for making and receiving calls. There is virtually no mobile signal within the Chisholme grounds (only on the top of the hill outside main house).

Other facilities, such as the study and meditation rooms, library, dining room, kitchen and office, are located in the main house, an eighteenth century Georgian listed building.

Wi-fi internet is available in the main house, where there is also a computer for public use.

The estate comprises nearly 200 acres of forest, pasture and gardens, including a walled vegetable garden and a sustainably managed log-boiler that provides heating and hot water using timber from Chisholme woodlands.

Fees and Payment

The course fee is £6000. The fee includes all costs of food and accommodation, course materials and the one-week study trip to Turkey*. A deposit of £500 must be paid when your application is accepted. This will be refunded if the course is cancelled. A reduced total fee of £5800 is available to those who pay this amount by 1 September.

A payment scheme is available for students requiring financial assistance. This allows for a minimum of £3000 to be paid before the course begins with the balance to be paid afterwards. Applications for this payment scheme will be considered individually; please contact the secretary concerning this.

Bursaries: full and partial bursaries may be available for qualifying students. Please contact the secretary if you wish to apply.

A student who withdraws due to unforeseen circumstances will get a portion of their fee returned or a portion of the amount still due reduced. The amount returned will be £28 per unused day less any money outstanding. For example, someone leaving with 100 days of the course remaining would normally be refunded £2800. However, if a student had at that point, and by prior agreement, only paid £3000 and so were still due to pay £3000, their debt would be reduced to £200.

***Note on the Journey to Turkey** The course fees cover all transport to and within Turkey, seven nights accommodation in Turkey including breakfasts, and entrance to museums in Turkey. Not included are the costs of refreshments and meals other than breakfasts. It is also a requirement that you have valid travel insurance for this trip and you must meet the cost of this. In the event of a significant rise in the costs of flights, transport or accommodation compared to those of December 2015 then you may be asked to pay a supplement. Such an increase in costs is not expected; it would be extremely unlikely that you would be asked to pay more than £100 extra. In the (also unlikely) event of the journey not taking place you would receive a refund based on the actual costs not incurred.

Application Procedure

If you are interested in applying for the course please request an application form from the School Secretary (secretary@chisholme.org).

Aims and learning outcomes for the course will be provided with application.

The Discovering Unity Intensive Six Month Winter Course is a significant commitment of time and money. As such prospective students are advised to undertake, if possible, either a **Discovering Unity evening course** or a **short introductory course** at Chisholme or elsewhere, in order to become familiar with the process and perspective within which the retreat happens.

We would also encourage you to visit Chisholme and find out more. You are strongly advised to submit your application early. Applications will usually be followed by an interview (Skype or telephone if a face-to-face meeting is not possible). You will be informed of your provisional acceptance for the course within a fortnight of applying.

Applicants from non-EEA (European Economic Area) countries please get in touch to find out about visa requirements.

Contact

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