

Moving Forward in Chaotic Times

Rediscovering Soft Power

Celebrating International Women's Day at Global Cooperation House, London

Sunday 4th March 2018, 2-5.30pm

REPORT

Over 60 people joined this annual special event to honour the UN International Women's Day and to highlight the wealth of strengths and contribution that women bring to the world. Quotes of inspiration from powerful women leaders representing *Soft Power* were shown on screen as everyone entered: Dadi Janki (*Faith and Wisdom*), Mother Theresa (*Unconditional Love and Care*), Michelle Obama (*Grace and Dignity*), Maya Angelou (*Courage and Commitment*) and Louis Hay (*Self-care and Delight*).

BK Vicky Rainbow set the scene with several uplifting songs '*What the world needs now is truth and with truth for all there will be peace...*'



MC Grace Mufti welcomed and mapped out the afternoon that was to focus on the rediscovering of *Soft Power: the power and ability to reshape, adapt and recreate; the power to adjust and to collaborate rather than to compete,*

BK Samantha Fraser then held a conversation on Soft Power with Jan Alcoe, author of *Lifting our Spirits*; Natasha Elcock, a survivor of the Grenfell Tower disaster and activist for *Grenfell United*, a group working with the NHS to support victims of trauma; And BK Rosemary Turbeville Smith, a mother and a woman who has overcome many adversities in her life. Each speaker shared a different dramatic journey in which they have developed strength.

Jan Alcoe, diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour, overcame the fear of impending mortality and the stress this created for her children. She transformed the situation by shifting her approach from the assertiveness of *fighting* cancer to drawing on deeper resources of gentleness and loving the self, as well as adopting gratitude and a softer way to embrace the

medical support and medication. This shift amazed her oncologist who noticed that Jan didn't manifest many of the side effects of chemotherapy and that the tumour diminished rapidly.

Natasha Elcock was an eleventh-floor resident of Grenfell Tower, in Ladbrooke Grove, until June 14th of last year when the fire struck that killed 71 people. *I was rescued by 4.45am in the morning and was second last to be rescued by the fire fighters. Since that morning my whole life has turned upside down ... it has been chaos. Grenfell United was created as a voice so we could be heard. Straight afterwards I was in survival mode and just kept going to get a roof over our heads. I joined this group of residents and I have met the PM and MP's and realised that they are all just normal people and not to be feared due to their titles.* She is now working with the NHS to help bring support to those suffering trauma. She is advocating for people who are getting rehoused but are being isolated and who don't have friends around. It is important for her to help these people get the help they need. She is grateful for being given a voice in the NHS to help support people dealing with trauma from different faiths and cultures. *I take the positives out of a negative situation. It has all shown me that if we come together and unify we can be heard and that there is no need for aggression. We hold our dignity, and the positive relationships and friendships that have been formed are amazing. We are making a difference in how people are listened to whatever walk of life they come from. We are also changing people's perception of those who are less fortunate.*

BK Rosemary Turbeville: *I haven't had one specific trauma but had a childhood of feeling isolated and abandoned. After a childhood with a distant mother and living between UK and the Middle East and often as a child travelling on her own she learnt to just get on with life and to move along. She had to learn to be tough from very young but when she became a meditator she learnt to bring a softness in and to have the strength to let go of the feelings of abandonment and rejection that had been caused by all the separation and movement. She realises now that what she was looking for she can create for herself – love, peace and joy. She had become very good at wearing different masks throughout her adult life but when she started at The Brahma Kumaris, she said, 'My life switched completely and I'm still on the journey.'*





Samantha noted how she heard that in times of crisis the strength within us rises and she was curious to hear what the speakers thought were their unique strengths and how these have impacted those close to them.

Jan felt that the capacity to stand back and cease to be so engaged in others and in her own suffering really helped. She found that she could use her situation as an opportunity to practise inner compassion for herself as well as for others. She feels she has always been blessed by positivity.

Natasha identified resilience as the quality she realised she was using. She would not allow any negative emotion to get in the way of what was required. She lost her home and a family member yet refused to allow any negative force to creep in. She keeps being positive.

Rosemary recognised the ability to let go has been a great inner strength along with her innate wisdom to come out of situations. More recently she has realised that on a cellular level she holds some sorrow that she still needs to heal.

Samantha noted how each speaker is in a unique position of leadership and asked them how they ensure that they are sustaining themselves whilst being responsible for others, and how they keep the momentum of meeting their own needs amidst what they are doing.

Natasha shared how she puts herself in others' shoes and recognises how we are all part of a puzzle and are interlinked, so whatever we do can benefit others too. She noted how often she puts on a brave face and that, as well as helping others, she still needs to process her own journey and it is ok to let down her guard and work through what is going on. That is easier, she thought, when she is able to speak to others who she can relate to.

Jan quoted Maya Angelou saying that while we may not be able to control all the events that happen to us, we can decide not to be reduced by them. Instead, we can see them as opportunities to emerge more of who we are through self-compassion and not feeling guilty about looking after the self. We can continually tune in to see how something feels and let go of what isn't nurturing and bring in more of what sustains. She shared how she now sings in a choir, singing with children and in prisons. *It makes me feel so good and spiritually uplifted to be part of something that is bigger than myself.*

Rosemary has learnt that no one can bring her happiness or joy except God *who makes me feel special and can help me heal and then I am able to give to others.*

Samantha asked each of the three for one last message:

- Always look for the positive in the negative.
- If you can rediscover a sense of calm within, you can find a way forward, whether through meditation or a walk in nature. This will enable the mind to open up and see where you need to go.
- Take time out to be silent and declutter the mind so the truth can come out. We cannot do this when we are too busy.

Jan was asked whether she had any advice for people supporting someone who is going through cancer. *Play and laughter are great healing tools ... be alongside others and help them to laugh as it is a fantastic medicine, and be a consistent supportive presence.*

A lady in the audience shared how, through listening to these stories from women who are mothers, she is now able to see from her mother's perspective, who had coped with being widowed with 11 children, in poverty. She had emotionally closed down in order to cope. She could now understand why.

Jan acknowledged **Natasha's** huge courage and dignity in speaking today in what is still, ongoingly, a very traumatic life situation and she then led everyone through a creative visualization to experience being steady and stable.

MC Grace noted how the speakers' honesty was beautiful and releasing and she invited Vicky to conduct some movement before tea and returning from tea she sang two more songs.

BK Jessica Hirani, a secondary school teacher for 14 years and raj yoga meditation practitioner for the past 5 years led everyone through a reflective session on exploring Soft Power for themselves and in groups. Qualities such as faith and wisdom; grace and dignity; unconditional love and care; courage and commitment and self-care and delight were all identified as Soft Powers that we can tap into and use.



Sister Jayanti, European Director of the Brahma Kumaris was invited to address the gathering with the following points:

- There is a Connection that is available to all of us.
- There is an interesting connection between women and God's power. ShivShakti.
- Shiva is one name given to The Divine that means to give benefit.
- Shakti is power, the soft inner power and it is associated with women.
- Spirituality is today a word that is appreciated, in amongst all the 'hard power' of the world
- The role of women today is paramount and has a pivotal role to play at this moment in history to bring about transformation so that love, compassion and care come back into all our systems.
- Where the 'humaneness' of humanity has disappeared women can bring it back when they awaken through the One above and allow their inner qualities to emerge.
- There is inherent goodness within the human spirit, and not just qualities of the soul but also soft power:
 - The power of peace is not passive but a power that can move and shift things
 - The power of love and truth – when there is a principle we believe to be true we stand by it.
 - We have seen in reality how peace, love and joy can work and we are waiting for the tipping point. When we connect together that connection can help our own personal development and the power of this minority is able to shift the energy of the world.
- I believe the future is a very beautiful one.
- There may be more chaos and that is ok as it is a sign of change because the power of peace and love is definitely the future.
- This is the future we hold and experiment with in our lives. There is a world of love and truth just ahead of us and waiting for us to be it and it will happen....

Sister Jayanti conducted a mediation on the power of love reaching us from beyond and awakening and transforming the entire human family



MC Grace gave thanks for the afternoon and invited everyone to receive toli and blessings while Vicky sang a closing song.

ENDS