

So, this activity that sort of evolved organically requires a Christmas tree image. We can paint, draw, cut one out or even use a small ornamental tree. We then go on to mark significant events that have occurred around this season in the past. We can, for instance, draw baubles and fill them in with the year, the stories, the event and salient emotion or we can write and create something that represents the experience. We can stick or hang little cards with whatever we need to write to mark an experience. We can create an Advent Calendar type of tree. Whatever suits us depending on how creative we want to get. As emotions come up we can feel them, tap on them, meditate on each item and emotion and engage in processes that allows some release. We can return to it as many times as we deem necessary over the weeks of this period until we feel the exercise has served its purpose for the time being bearing in mind that the events are of the past and that they will probably revisit us. Sometimes cognitive recognition is all one can handle and for others who have done more work deeper integration can occur. We can then throw or save the tree as a remembrance of what we have sailed through or overcome. Clarissa Pinkola Estes does a process, over a longer period of time, where women make a coat either from paper or fabric and then pin on images, poems, notes or other objects that represent significant traumas, injustices, losses over the span of a life time. Once everything has become visible and tangible and has been processed one can dispose of the coat or keep it to be reminded of the battle scars.

As part of engaging with the exercise we can also reflect on what Christmas means for us or what new meaning making we would like to construct, which is more relevant to our current circumstances and age. I have been reading *Last Christmas: Memories of Christmases past and hopes for future ones* curated & introduced by Greg Wise & Emma Thompson (2019). In this book they have collated people's personal memories of past Christmases and their hopes for future ones. They found that the collection of writings showed that all of us basically desire the same things. So, whether we are Christian or not and whether we are a refugee, a person who has escaped persecution in another country, a homeless person, a charity worker, a vicar, doctor, beautician, comedian, famous actor or journalist, we basically share the same hopes.

They write that even though the book is in some sense based on a religious festival it is about humanity. In the book everybody addresses Christmas day, but the interesting thing is that the people who have submitted their stories come from Iraq, South Sudan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Palestine, East Africa, Syria, the UK, the US, The stories show that Christmas can embody the stark reality of one's life and that there are

many ways of experiencing Christmas, but what may be the connecting thread of all the stories is the idea that the birth of baby Jesus represents hope, as all children inspire hope in their parents.

Emma Thompson and Greg Wise write or quote: 'In those writings we get a glimpse of the universal aspect of this 'story of displacement, where Mary and Joseph are forced to leave home, and give birth in a strange place in a simple manger . . . Then, on the run from authoritarian rule, they become refugees.' 'The Christ birth story is our story. The marginalised, the dispossessed, the homeless and the refugees, are at the heart of this tale' 'Christmas challenges each of us . . . to refuse to be ruled by fear and tribalism, to reach out and connect to those who are not like us...'

Two paragraphs from the stories in the book:

'The love a Syrian mother has for her children, the staunch devotion a Somali orphan shows for her helpless younger brother, these are the most powerful forces in the world. This force has to stand up to the sandstorm of the combined forces of greed, selfishness and indifference, but each birth and each child that survives is a Christ and each murder by violence or neglect is a crucifixion.' (Stephen Fry, British writer)

'Had the war not broken out in Syria, I'd almost be a qualified architect by now. Close to being a graduate of the University of Damascus, visiting building sites with my blueprints rolled up under my arm, respected and professional. Instead I am building makeshift shelters in a refugee camp wondering where my plans went. We have nothing here but hope. But I am assured by the volunteers, who have celebrated Christmas every year of their lives, that hope for humankind is the true Yuletide spirit. They explain the baby Jesus was once a refugee running from a ruthless dictator too. He was born in a stable. A star in the sky guided the three wise men from the east to find him. I hope such a star is shining for me...; (Steve Ali, Syrian refugee)