

“We are disturbed not by what happens to us, but by our thoughts about what happens.”

Greek philosopher, Epictetus

“Is it true?”

So comes the opening gambit of the famously ordinary American woman whose simple process of self-inquiry, ‘The Work’, is credited with transforming millions of lives worldwide.

Elegantly dressed in black, Byron Katie’s exuberant blue eyes smile across the 400-strong audience at the Pitville Pump Room in Cheltenham, where she is presenting her Work, hosted by the Isbourne Holistic Centre, a charity aiming ‘to create positive lives through education’.

“Hopefully you’ll leave this evening understanding how to identify the thoughts you are thinking,” Katie says, “the thoughts that cause all the stress, depression, violence and suffering in the world. And hopefully you’ll understand how

experiencing the opposite of what you believe. You put these questions up against a stressful thought, such as ‘I’m too fat’ or ‘Life is unfair’.

The questions are:

Is it true?

Can you absolutely know that it’s true?

How do you react when you believe that thought?

Who would you be without the thought?

Is It Really

to question those thoughts. The Work is a way to identify the thoughts that are causing the stress, depression or anger in your life.”

The Work was born in 1986 when, following a ten-year spiral into depression, anger and addiction, Byron Kathleen Reid – a forty-three year old mother from a small Californian desert town – woke up on the floor of a halfway house with an astonishing, life-changing realisation. “In that instant of no-time, waking up to reality,” she would tell me later, “I discovered that when I believed my thoughts, I suffered, but that when I didn’t believe them, I didn’t suffer, and that this is true for every human being. Freedom is as simple as that. I found that suffering is optional. I found a joy within me which has never disappeared, not for a single moment. That joy is in everyone, always.”

Questioning every painful thought she had, Katie swiftly developed her amazing method of self-inquiry. The Work consists of four questions and a “turnaround”, a way of

When Katie returned home from the halfway house people were astounded at the change. Her children, who had been terrified by her rages, were amazed to find her peaceful and full of love. People started to approach Katie for help and she’d ask them the four questions. She soon received invitations to meet with gatherings of people to share what she had learnt – and from 1992, The Work suddenly mushroomed as Katie demonstrated it at churches, community and therapy centres, hotel conferences, businesses, hospitals, prisons and schools – all over America and then across Europe. She’s been mostly on the road ever since.

Byron Katie came to my attention three years ago, when my ex girlfriend Gillie read her seminal book *Loving What Is* and began to challenge my stress-generating thoughts. “Is that really true?” she’d question me. I began to hear people rave about workshops with Katie in London and I’d read endless praises of her Work – even Eckhart Tolle, the cele-

True?

According to Byron Katie, suffering comes from believing our thoughts. Will Gethin reports on her recent visit to Cheltenham, where she presented her Work.

brated author of *The Power or Now*, was calling her “a great blessing for this planet”. I decided to invite her to present for the Isbourne Holistic Centre, where I run a programme of educational events with leading MBS authors. I invited Katie three times before finally striking lucky in December – by chance she was scheduled to present her *Work* in Liverpool in January to 400 drug workers for a “Road to Recovery” conference, and could come to Cheltenham en route back to the States.

On stage in Cheltenham, Katie invites the audience to fill in their “Judge Your Neighbour” worksheets, expressing their judgments about others on paper, to which they can then apply *The Work*. Once sufficient time has elapsed, she asks for an audience volunteer to read their opening statement.

A girl in a lumberjack coat and a woolly hat raises her hand and is handed a microphone. “I am angry at my mum because she wasn’t there for me,” she says, her voice welling with emotion.

“So sweetheart, want to step into my parlour?” proposes Katie.

Wrapping the girl in a motherly hug, Katie gestures for her to sit in the leather armchair across from her. Asking the girl to repeat her opening statement and those that followed on her worksheet, Katie applies her four customary ques-

tions, followed by the “turnaround”, ultimately leading the girl to her truth: “My mother was there for me.”

“I get it,” grins the girl. “And I’m still in the place of waiting for reality to match my imagination!”

“This work takes courage, because it shows you that you were wrong, that the foundations of our entire lives have been built on imagination,” Katie says.

However, there isn’t always a quick solution to every problem. The next volunteer, who is angry at her mother for allowing her father to abuse her, is resistant to shifting her thinking and Katie recommends she source a qualified local facilitator of *The Work* from her website (www.thework.com) who can give her the time she needs.

The Work can be applied to all manner of issues, from major illnesses and addictions to bereavement and financial insecurity. “Again and again I have seen *The Work* quickly and radically transform the way people think about their problems,” writes Katie’s husband, the writer Stephen Mitchell, in his introduction to Katie’s book, *Loving What Is*. “And as the thinking changes, the problems disappear.”

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The Work:

Anyone can do *The Work* by visiting www.thework.com. The website includes free materials to download, audio and



Photo: Rick Rusing

video clips, a network of *Work* facilitators, information about training programmes and a schedule of events.

Next UK Event:

Byron Katie returns to give a one-day workshop in London on Saturday 24th July, hosted by Alternatives, see www.alternatives.org.uk

The Isbourne Holistic Centre

Other evening events run by the Isbourne Centre include shaman Davina Mackail’s “Unlocking the Power of Your Dreams” on Monday 26th April, scientist David Hamilton’s “Kindness is Good for You” on Monday 10th May and “Peace Troubadour” James Twyman’s “Peace Concert” on Tuesday 8th June. For bookings and further information visit www.isbourne.org or call 01242 254 321. The centre is at 4 Wolseley Terrace, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 1TH.

Road to Recovery Conference, Liverpool

Katie helped launch Inexcess Television’s 2010 “Year of Recovery” programme which aims to shift the way we think about addiction problems and encourage more people to seek help (www.inexcess.tv)