

# Mining for gold in troubled times

**Sandra Kimball** stakes her claim

**C**ALAMITY ARRIVES AND doesn't bother to knock. Just when we think we've got it all figured out, the door swings open and a job comes to an end, marriages aren't working, illness robs our vitality or in some other way we lose what we love. Panic sets in as the truth that our environment is not so easy to control bends our lives into the shape of a question mark.

To unfurl from troubling times requires the confidence to stop and take an honest look at how we relate to ourselves and find a noble response to our circumstances. It's a shock when we come face to face with our addiction to entitlement and it takes courage to drop preconceptions of how we think things should be.

The reality is that there is no such thing as lasting security and no one is left untouched by adversity. We must release the need to know why things happen as they do and understand that trying to control the uncontrollable only increases the discomfort. We don't need to add more angst, discouragement or despair to the chaos. Instead, we can go mining for gold.

Our minds get shaken when we collide with conflict, contradictions, and misfortune. One way to strengthen and get back into shape after a setback is to recognise, support, and validate certain qualities of the mind. The original word in the ancient Pali language for meditation is "*bhavana*," which in the full sense of the term means mental development. When we work with our mind, it becomes like gold, pure and useful. When things are genuine and wholesome, any kind of achievement is possible.

In the middle of a crisis it may be difficult to sit calmly in meditation, but we can still develop inner strength. One way is to rely on others until we are able to stand on our own again. Choosing good and wise people to associate with allows us to relax into ourselves and re-align with what is most important. When social bonds are strong we know that when we're ready, the time will come to change places and we'll be able to focus on another person just as they did for us.

But true strength comes when we can depend on ourselves.

## Conviction

To mine for gold, you must first stake a claim. Make a conviction to be impeccable in your own eyes. Most of the time we're overly concerned about what others think or how we might appear. But it only takes one good humiliation, being judged harshly, or not accepted, or a moment of shame or embarrassment to put us on the ground. And we can't jump over ourselves as if we weren't there.

Lucy discovered that her husband of 20 years had been having an affair for over a year. Anger and shame burst like an infected boil and took hold in her heart. The dregs of bitterness and regret are often what remain when we attempt to empty of these strong emotions. But Lucy acknowledged that there is no better way to understand something than to fully enter into it and was determined to make use of anger as a transformative energy. With patient attention, she took a good look at what she believed about herself, her marriage and her passion. She noticed how far back, how deep and wide this anger was, and eventually, the malice began to subside. By befriending herself she was able to transmute the anger into a passion for life she had been ignoring for a long time. From this capacity to love herself, she experienced an unobstructed basis on which to build a healthy sense of caring for others. Lucy was able to confidently take a stand and act from qualities we consider morally good and abandon those that continue a cycle of harm.

Persistence is what is needed to find the vein of gold and stay the course. Intention or making a determination is useless without discipline and patience. Robert found himself in a dark valley of depression after the sudden death of his wife. For him, the future without her was frightening, even terrifying. For a few months it was necessary to take things not a day at a time but one-third of a day at a time. To stay with our shakiness, our broken hearts, and disappointments without worrying about adequacy or relevance, we give ourselves a break. At another time, an audacious act or unrelenting effort to endure a hardship is the right call in our pursuit of mental strength and development. The gold is there, we're just finding our way to it. If we persevere in our desire to find our way, we will.

Mindfulness is to be diligently aware of thoughts, words, and actions. To find gold, we pan and scan. Scanning is being observant of what's just below the surface like a prospector with a metal detector. Panning is patiently letting the dirt settle to the bottom of the water and being ever so watchful while sifting the gold from the grains of sand.

When Gerald discovered his son was dealing illegal drugs at his high school, he was thrown into confusing new parental territory. He needed to approach the situation with care and a good measure of restraint. We are thinking human beings and while in meditation we can stretch the space between thoughts, sometimes it's

best to turn our full attention to them. Gerald was able to watch closely and sift out what thoughts were non-directional and discursive. These thoughts, like sand, were useless to the situation and caused him the most stress. Gaining some insight into his own thinking process, he could judge what thoughts led him to the best course of action. With the power of observation coupled with persistence and determination, we shift our focus from what we want to get out of life to what we are glad to give in advance.

## Concentration

When it's hard to focus, focus on what's hard. If all we see is the dirt and grit and discouragement sets in, stay with the discouragement. Making it more complicated than it needs to be creates a lot of fuss and bother and the very process of allowing things to be as they are energises the mind. Life has its highs and lows, things appear and disappear, concentration is what helps us know this. Settling the mind with a steadiness of attention on watching things change brings an honesty that isn't fixed and hard, but is cool and peaceful. With our minds firmly centred, concentration becomes like a sieve extracting inner richness.

## Discernment

Cleaning the dirt and grit from the gold is the ability to judge well. By working with the qualities of the mind, we gain the wisdom to know what changes and what stays the same, distinguishing what is gold from what washes away. We notice if in our lives we are trading in gold or paper.

The intention is to have a mind like gold that is malleable yet strong. Small but of significant value, gold flecks and nuggets give rise to great results. We may only be able to pound out a thin brittle sheet to start with. But with practise, the mind becomes more useful, pure and durable. We don't need to worry about our earlier efforts anymore; the last fashioning of beauty and artistry becomes our standard.

We're all affected by the mood of the times and it's easy to feel overwhelmed by our troubles, inaccuracies, and confusions. A typical first reaction might be to throw money at our problems and capture or add more experiences. When mining for gold, we learn that listening to ourselves is slow and steady work.

Meditation centres can be a mother lode or you can seek the wise counsel of someone you trust to have knowledge about working with gold. Finding gold stretches our capacity for experience and the more we open, the more a natural sense of joy and fulfilment enters into our lives.

Pure gold nourishes the heart. **KTO**

*Names and identifying information have been changed. For further information, contact: [sandra@internationalcounselling.com](mailto:sandra@internationalcounselling.com)*