

# Summary Report

## **Decisions, Decisions** **Exploring the Art of Decision-making**

**A residential seminar for people who work within  
offender management**

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**HELD AT**

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

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**The Sky is Always There** Camilla Carr, former British Aid worker held hostage in Chechnya, in conversation with Wendy Marshall, Social Entrepreneur and Co-founder, Hope Mountain'

In 1997, Camilla and her partner Jon James were working with children in Chechnya who had been traumatised by the war when they were abducted by armed, masked men. Their kidnap was to last for fourteen months, often being held in physically and mentally challenging conditions.

From the beginning they made a conscious decision to see their captors as people, as human beings; although ones damaged by their circumstances. They began a dialogue with their captors so the captors would see them as human beings and not just commodities to be exchanged for money. They also heard the captor's stories of the awful suffering they had experienced and witnessed in the war.

The first months were also punctuated by physical and psychological abuse, including Camilla being repeatedly raped by one of the guards.

*"I dealt with the immediacy of that by taking myself out of it, knowing that whatever he did to me he could never harm my soul. When I told Jon he did not show anger or get upset, although, of course, he was. He just listened. That was what I needed most."*

After months of sexual abuse she was to burst into tears and refuse to comply further. Later, with the help of a dictionary, she told him clearly that there was to be no more sex or violence. He was puzzled by this and said 'you're a western woman and so give free sex.' His perspective had been coloured by watching so many cheap western movies. From then on he never touched Camilla and would talk about his dreams for the future, like a friend.

Camilla explained that their approach, which Wendy described as practical spirituality, was to begin each day by mentally projecting harmony towards their captors; to let go of the horrors of the previous day and to prepare for the new one. Camilla describes this as forgiveness, a letting go.

*"We decided to take the line of least resistance, to acknowledge things like anger but not to allow it to manifest. Jon and I talked a lot, and although I knew he was very angry, he chose to suppress it. It was important to show them no emotion but to find ways to diffuse situations."*

*"We realised that this was going to be difficult. These men really were damaged. We knew that whatever was to happen, the best strategy was to stay in a place of calm."*

To maintain that calm they used hatha yoga, Ti Chi and internal, spiritual tools, drawing upon no particular religion but with an awareness of the impact of vibrations: that love, prayer and calmness can travel.

Wendy suggested, *"It must be hard to love those who do you great harm. You seem to have begun from a place of compassion for and understanding of the other person: seeing the 'person' behind the act."*

Camilla explained more about their spiritual outlook that helped them to survive.

*"As beings of energy, we would appeal to the power of light (God) to give help in our 'little hot concrete box'. At these times I would always feel a rush of energy. At times when I was ill and in pain, I would ask for help and received it."*

*"We would have an imaginary peace pipe and invite our families, friends and people who had influenced us into a circle, then ask for their prayers for both ourselves and for our captors, too."*

Camilla explained that for the final months of their captivity they were moved to live in cellars of 'lived in' family houses. The conditions were terrible but there was no physical or psychological abuse. This enabled them to begin their healing process so that by the time they saw their families again they were more grounded.

Camilla explained that neither she nor Jon suffered from PTSD but there was no doubt they had both been traumatised, remaining with them both for many months and leading to illness.

Asked about the effects of the confinement, Camilla described how after the initial pleasure of being released she collapsed from

the stress of just 'holding on' and how crying helped her, both during and after the experience but how Jon had found it difficult to express his emotions.

*"He had been holding on for so long that one night he just got out of bed, opened the window and shouted for help at the top of his voice. He was then to 'disappear' for a period, just walking the streets of London, talking to the homeless, which helped him feel less alone in his own suffering."*

There followed a period of questions from the delegates which led to a discussion about forgiveness. Camilla described forgiveness as 'letting go, and understanding.' She has forgiven her captors, being inspired by the belief that love is all around us and that if you ask for it, help will come.

From the discussions, it was felt that forgiveness is really a personal journey, meaning different things to different people. It is, however, a conscious choice!

**When I Change, the World Changes**  
Workshop with Ann Renton, Volunteer and Trustee, New Bridge and Dave Willis, Head of Business Management Unit, HMYOI Huntercombe

Both Ann and Dave shared experiences of personal decisions and their subsequent impact to ground the process in an offender management context.

Ann described how many factors come into play in decision-making but for her it had to 'feel right.' Also 'you don't know if it is the right decision until later but having made the decision to have the strength to live with it.'

Ann's example involved a decision relating to the family business after her husband's death.

*"I recognised that you can either become angry and bitter or you let go and move on. And yet, for me, there was still a sense of injustice remaining such that I didn't feel I could hold out an olive branch."*

What finally enabled Ann to let go was a card she received on which it said, 'we do not need to have people in our lives that damage us.' It was as though this sentiment gave permission for Ann to act in a way that was in her best interest although going against what society

generally believes. *"I am now beyond anger and emotion but feel at peace."*

Working in a busy prison department, Dave's decision was aimed at improving an established system. He spoke of the benefits of deciding to change the manner in which statistical information was conveyed.

*"It used to be that the statistics were collected and presented to the Governor from which he could see which departments were performing well and which not and then take appropriate action. I now meet with the functional heads before meeting with the Governor. This allows departments to see the direction in which they are moving, identify any problems and prepare a response."*

*The benefits are that everyone are more involved in the SMT meetings rather than just gaining an overview, to keep their finger on the pulse."*

In conclusion, Dave suggested, *"It has made my life easier; that more people are aware of what those staff that are away are doing and has made the Business Management Unit more integrated and approachable."*

The delegates then discussed, in small groups, the following questions:

*We are all capable of making good decisions but can we maintain such quality when under pressure?*

*Do we feel comfortable with the decisions we make ... every time?*

*How do we know when to take decisions and when to stand back and let things unfold?*

*Are we always clear when to involve others in making a decision?*

*How do our decisions affect the individual, the team and the community?*

Some feedback specifically around the third question was:

*"The first decision is whether I need to make a decision now or later when I can be more informed. If there is not the time to give consideration to the situation then we fall back on training/experience which itself can inform you as to what is the right decision. Sometimes there is no decision to make but to do things in the way that you are told."*

*What is important though is that where you don't have time to make a decision or to explain the reason for an action then make time to deal with the repercussions; to rebuild the relationship."*

## **Managing Our Mind**

Introduced by Rose Kelly, Coordinator,  
Brahma Kumaris Inner Space

Noise is one of the characteristics of our busy world and so creating space for silence is essential. However, we can use noise as a displacement activity to obscure truth or the things inside me that I don't want to see.

*"Silence is an opportunity in which to become more aware of your feelings, to listen to our heart, to gain clarity on something that is bothering you. It can be experienced to be very comforting; a space where there is no distraction.*

*Silence can also be a place of discomfort when the voice of the conscience helps you address something that you have been avoiding. In fact, this discomfort is good for if I sit with it, I come to understand what needs to be addressed and listen to the answers that already exist inside: this is the gift of silence."*

In most spiritual practices silence is associated with truth and truth cannot remain hidden but can be obscured by noise, busy-ness and involvement in activity. The opportunity to be still and quiet provides the space for wisdom to grow, where you can sense the truth of your being. Silence allows truth the space to emerge. When we face truth we always emerge stronger as a consequence.

*"If I am able to accumulate moments of silence through the day – to drip feed myself – then, when I need to make a decision 'on the hoof,' it becomes easier as I have a reservoir of inner strength inside to draw upon."*

**Discern, Decide, and Deliver** with Doug Stephenson, Prison Outreach Coordinator, Brahma Kumaris (UK)

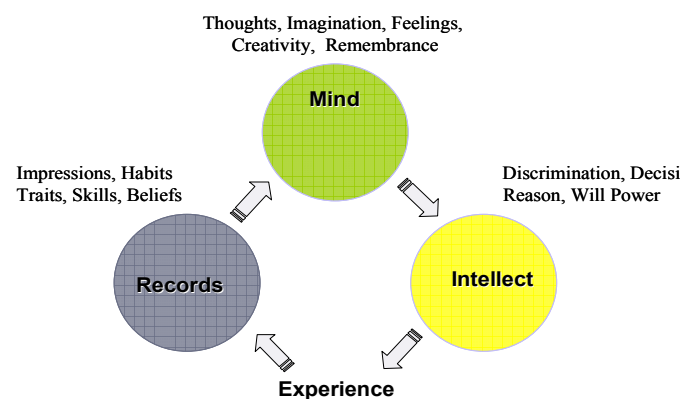
Doug spoke of scientific experimentation that concluded that with focussed attention on our thoughts we draw towards us the people or the information that we need in a particular moment. This verified the experiences Camilla shared.

The experiments show that intention affects living and non-living systems. In three separate experiments, a group of experienced meditators were given a specific goal to focus on during meditation. Experiments focussed on three separate goals to affect (i) pH of a water sample, (ii) rate of development of larvae, (iii) rate of working of a liver enzyme.

The intended results were all achieved by the meditators suggesting that our intention can shape reality and the state of our mind affects our ability to shape reality.

Doug then shared a model, developed by the Brahma Kumaris that describes the connection between the conscious (mind), sub-conscious (records / behaviour patterns) and the power of reason (intellect).

The mind and the intellect work together. The mind is responsible for thoughts, memories, feelings, creativity and the intellect, in 'conversation' with the mind will discern what is appropriate and decide what action to take. The intellect is therefore involved in understanding, insight, reason, and judgement. Once acted out, the experience is registered in the records as an impression.



The more times we repeat any one experience, the stronger becomes the impression recorded – like a saw being drawn across wood. After numerous repetitions this will become a habitual pattern of behaviour. When a habit is created the intellect will no longer question or challenge the mind as to the appropriateness of its way of thinking.

To change a habit the intellect once again needs to be empowered, (with regard to that specific pattern) initially through the recognition of the inappropriateness of the actions, and then subsequently but drawing on a deeper understanding and insights as to the benefits of change.

It is the power of reason that alerts me to the choices that are available to me. What I choose to give attention to replaces the old patterns of behaviour with the new ones. This shift in focus can be summarised in the expression, 'Where my attention goes, life grows and energy flow.'

When I am 'aware,' I have the capacity to make choices at every step - to take full responsibility for my own thoughts, feelings, actions, words, relationships and connections. If I am uncomfortable with any of this, then that discomfort is a mirror that comes to show me where the potential for change lies – vis-à-vis what Rose Kelly spoke of when preparing the delegates for the period of silent reflection.

### **Spiritual Perspectives for Effective Decision-Making** with Sister Jayanti, Director, Brahma Kumaris (UK) and Middle East

Sister Jayanti suggested how, at times, the state of our mind is similar to driving in torrential rain; there are many things clouding the issue such that it is very difficult to see where I wish to go and the journey becomes very uncomfortable.

*"Decision-making has a huge impact on people's lives. Maybe a decision I make today will have a ripple effect and I don't know how far these ripples will reach. If I make a good decision maybe that becomes the standard and raises the benchmark for many others, far and wide or the decisions we make for our children can affect them for many years to come. At the time of making a decision we are not so far-sighted as to recognize the impact on future generations."*

It is important to make decisions under the correct mental circumstances. So what can I do to still the storm that is happening in the mind? One is to have the practice of making space for silent time.

*"Two things may happen in silence. One is that we may go very deep inside and find that*

*inner point of peace, that point that nothing can touch. The second is that when reflecting on what's going on inside we can find pain, sorrow, or unhappy memories that have been pushed into the background, suppressed or repressed, come to the surface."*

For effective decision making it's vital to learn how to connect with that deeper stillness within each one of us as well as give ourselves time and space in which we are able to process what is happening in our inner world. If what I am experiencing inside is good then how do I develop it further, if it's not so good then what can I learn from that experience so as to be better prepared for when I face the same situation again? One's response to a situation doesn't have to be the same and so to take a different method or attitude will lead to a different outcome. It is, therefore, so important to make time to process what's happening within oneself.

*"It is also important to sit with colleagues and process the external information. However, the pressures exerted on us in today's world may mean that we don't have that time with colleagues – perhaps this too has become a luxury. If so, it becomes even more essential that I find time to process things for myself. This may be at the time of going to bed. If I have processed things at the end of the day then the sleep I have will be more refreshing, natural and easy than if I had a head full of various thoughts."*

*"The silence at the beginning of the day will offer an opportunity to find my inner stability. In the silence at the end of the day ask the self, 'What could I have done differently?' (Not better or wrong, just differently.) This one question enables the mind to become clearer and the heart to become lighter and freer; it emerges many aspects that help still the storm."*

*As a second question, ask, "What did I learn today?" (For example, something I heard in conversation or something I read.) The intellect – that part of me which takes in information and retains it as knowledge - continues to develop the capacity, to a very high level, for making decisions. Keeping the intellect clean and clear will help the decision making process."*

Decision making is not instant! When I do have to make a decision fast my inner

preparations will be invaluable. If I made these preparations in terms of how to still my mind, how to develop the capacity of my intellect, how to access my inner truth then, in a moment, within any situation, I have a greater ability to deal with that situation.

*“Three things in particular have a major impact on decision-making: attachment, desires and ego. If I have attachment to a person, an idea, or an outcome my decision-making will not be clear and balanced: there will be something I want and invariably there will be disappointment.*

*If I am emotionally attached to some desire or inner need, then I am subtly taking from my position. If I fill myself with the higher awareness of who and what I am, and what I have within me and carry that value, dignity and awareness of my spiritual treasures, I will not go into a situation with any desires: there’s a contentment and a fulfilment that I have that spills out to others because of its abundance, and so is shared with others.*

*When there are personal desires there is a sense of ‘I want, I wish, I need power, position, or appreciation.’ In this way, my heart is not clean at that moment. If I make time in the morning and connect with the inner treasures of peace and happiness such that I feel very full very content then desires are not a factor.*

*Where there is ego then unless things go as I want, I feel pain. I need to develop an inner state where there is recognition of the good things that happened but without fueling my ego of ‘I did this.’ In this way, if things don’t go as I wish, I still remain detached and deal with it appropriately.*

*Continue to ensure that the awareness of my inner being remains centered. Remind yourself through the day to pause, centre and refresh the self for a moment - decisions can then be made which you and you colleagues will be comfortable with. The outcome will also be the right one.”*

**Address** by Maureen Goodman,  
Programmes Director, Brahma Kumaris (UK)

*“During this seminar, beliefs and assumptions may have been challenged; new perspectives created; maybe a re-evaluation of how you work – not just in prison but in life in general.*

*When you move too far away from things that are natural you have to find methods to reintroduce them. For example, some schools are now teaching inner happiness while in some communities, mothers are being instructed how to bond with their children. Both should be natural!*

*In the past, our inner happiness may have been developed from maintaining determined thoughts that reject the challenge you’re faced with. However, this may be subtly suppressing fear of the thing that you’re face with. Perhaps now is the time to deal with it in a different way – by loving the self and others, rather than rejecting condemning or judging – the things we can do so quickly.*

*We have recently been carrying out an internal audit within the Brahma Kumaris where I have been specifically looking at the topic of caring for the family. The essence of caring is perhaps ‘giving everyone a chance.’ However, we first need to do something for ourselves. The potential of these seminars is to increase the good wishes of the self and others. This will translate into the way in which we work with others and the effect or impact that you have on others.*

*These seminars do two things: they take people out of there working environment and they bring people into this environment which is conducive to generating those good feelings and to unearth our inherent qualities.”*

### **Sustaining the Change** with Mal Gillan

Conversations were developed around three questions designed for delegates to revisit the learning from the seminar. (i) What can I do to enhance my own decision-making?

(ii) How should I communicate with others who have not been part of a decision-making process? (iii) If I am involved in making decisions with others who maybe don’t share my values or views or who are just ‘plain difficult’, what can I bring to the table to ease the process?

## Appendix 1: Responses to Group Discussion Questions in ‘Sustaining the Change’

### What can I do to enhance my own decision-making?

#### Prior to the decision

- Receive adequate training
- Gather information (facts),
- Seek experience (collective ideas)
- Ascertain reason (Why? What? When? How?)
- Understand the level of priority
- Get the right people together
- You don't have to stay in the company of negative people
- Clarity of aim(why), targets (what), goals (when) and method

#### Of value during decision-making

- Give yourself adequate time to have any discussion
- Ask myself if I am in the right frame of mind to make the decision now
- Don't hold any negative attitudes towards anyone involved in the decision
- Be free from other pressures and responsibilities to whatever extent possible
- Be fresh
- Ensure that all the information is on the table
- Hold in mind the vision which you wish to achieve
- Be clear about degree to which you are prepared to compromise
- Don't be too attached to a specific outcome: attachment compromises good decision-making
- Ask myself, ‘to what extent will this be of benefit to all concerned?’
- Recognise how this decision will impact on others
- Understand the motivation of others involved
- Listen with attention
- Be empathetic
- Know your parameters
- Observe without judgement or criticism
- Recognise and maintain your values that affect decision making (e.g. integrity, honesty)
- Know the values of the organisation
- Know the history; ‘has this been done before?’ What's different now to then
- Self awareness
- Restate the outcome and gain agreement from all involved

#### Personal practices

- Be able to say ‘no’ (not out of ego/resistance but when not personally practical)
- Develop courage
- Meditation
- Take time for *Just-a-minute* ([just-a-minute.org](http://just-a-minute.org))
- Reflect on outcomes and understand where I need to change
- Process the day before I go to bed – deeper sleep
- Develop the practice of silence
- **ORA** – **O**bserve the situation, **R**each inside for calm, **A**ct Positively

**How should I communicate with others who have not been part of a decision-making process?**

- Be transparent and honest
- Communication style is important
- Face to face where possible, personalised communication when not
- Offer support
- Connect with people not involved in the decision-making process in the lead up to the discussion. Explain why they are/were not involved
- Provide feedback as soon as appropriate
- Be approachable
- Listen to comments
- Give adequate time to talk
- Be conscious of body language and language of the eyes
- Monitor data and review
- Walking the floor, connecting with people|
- Be empathetic and autocratic
- Admit to mistakes
- Use appropriate method for communication: fliers, memos, briefings, meetings, notices, e-mail, intranet
- Gather feedback from the people not involved in the decision-making
- Create 'Offender Consultative Councils'

**If I am involved in making decisions with others who maybe don't share my values or views or who are just 'plain difficult', what can I bring to the table to ease the process?**

- Give self adequate time to prepare for the meeting
- Visualise a positive outcome for all
- Find a means to break the ice
- Offer an olive branch
- Listen and hear everyone
- Remain open-minded; without preconceptions
- Actively seek to find common ground
- Remain open to compromise
- Use love and peace to create a positive atmosphere where people will respond and feel able to speak
- Share what is important to me in a clear and concise manner
- Don't speak more than necessary
- Don't give up
- Communicate with honesty
- Remain professional throughout
- Actively seek understanding
- Respect other people's views
- Remind people of the ground rules when required
- Stay calm
- Don't become argumentative if challenged
- Practice the *Just-a-minute* meditation technique for yourself within the meeting ([www.just-a-minute.org](http://www.just-a-minute.org))
- Adopt a position of tolerance and acceptance
- Empathy – 'walk a mile in another man's shoes'
- Give it back to them to solve
- *Unearthing* – let them identify their own values



- Use humour
- Meditation