**‘Eleven Days, One Night, At The Lake’ (AECI)**

***‘A lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye, looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his or her own nature’ (Henry Thoreau)***

Do you perhaps live or work near to a lake? Can you reach a lake for between 15 and 30 minutes each day? Could you incorporate the following reflections into your daily routine, be it alone or alongside a friend, a colleague or someone you care for? Putting all distractions aside, the lake might be a helpful ‘natural’ means of considering, or measuring, our holistic health. Each stage is meant to be relaxing and simple to follow. By visiting the lake on 12 separate occasions we come to look deeper within ourselves, at our inner values and our direction. Perhaps select a convenient time every day for your visit and try to keep to it. Aim for a genuine focus on the various themes and questions on the sheet. And whatever the weather try to keep to the 15mins- 30mins idea! Good Luck! Any issues or questions that spring to mind contact: **aecinstitute3@gmail.com**

**Day One: The Lake and the Present -** It is easy to miss the importance of the present moment and to overlook the value of ‘presence’ amidst our busy and complex lives. The ‘presence’ of the lake is perhaps working its hidden potential, revealing and healing in unexpected ways. So, in our carefully guided programme over 12 visits to the lake, let’s begin with choosing your own name for the lake that you are to visit. Something memorable and meaningful to you. Once you’ve named it, approach the lake only from a distance on this trip. Look at it from the widest perspective, taking in the panorama of where and how the lake is situated, among trees, fields, pathways. Who or what surrounds it? Make a conscious note of the ‘present context of the lake’. Be aware of where the lake sits in relation to buildings, to traffic, to noise, to silence, to other external spaces. Consider this question; have you always been fully aware of this lake?

**Day Two: The Lake and the Light -** On your second visit to the lake, approach it sensitively and try to gain a closer perspective on it. Consider carefully the notion of light and darkness around the lake. Look carefully at the position of the sun, the clouds and the shaded areas. Are there clear reflections on the surface of the lake? Are areas of the water murkier than others? Try to observe the direction of any ripples on the lake. Begin to feel removed from any external conflict or feelings of anger and frustration you might hold. Think about this question; what does the daylight allow people to do around the lake? Observe their activities and their actions, even if it’s raining! There is something clearer in our head and our heart for being attentive at the lake side, there is a source of light working on you and upon the waters. You are for a brief moment at ease and comforted.

**Day Three: The Lake and Natural Life -** This is now your third visit to the lake. What creatures are active upon and around the lake? Birds? Fish? Squirrels? Insect life? What habitats are formed on its banks or under its surface? How does the lake sustain natural life? Take a photo if you are able to, capturing an element of this. What draws your eye? Whether you are visiting alone or with another, are you beginning to feel any sense of ‘companionship’ with the lake and its immediate surroundings**?** Are you aware of the many levels of belonging that operate in our world, and the sense of dependence on the ‘gifts of the environment’ that animal and human life share in so many respects?

**Day Four: The Lake and Imagination -** On this fourthvisit to the lake you will need a pen or pencil and paper. The image of the lake has been a source of imaginative inspiration for so many, for artists, poets, musicians and travel writers. Find a comfortable spot a little away from the perimeter of the lake. Can you attempt a rough sketch of the lake? Or combine a few feelings and words to construct a simple piece of poetry? The thrust of our lives, exploring sources of inspiration and light, can knit with a deep sense of creativity, of the Creator, at times. Through imagination we are affirming the value of a part of the natural landscape which in turn is opening up something of our own inner sense of wonder. We are suspending our own outlook to ‘tune in’ to what nature is doing. There is something very instinctive around our feelings and emotions by the lake. Start to trust them!

**Day Five: The Lake and Touch -** In a safe and responsible way, can you connect with something physically present yet peculiar to the lake. Its waters, its surrounding stones or trees, any shrubs and flowers at the lake side. It could even be something as simple as acknowledging a gentle breeze. We are naturally ‘tactile’ people, often wanting to hold onto a line or a thread of ‘goodness’ and ‘beauty’ within our surroundings. To draw on some physical sign of ‘benevolence’. To do so however we must strive to live with a level of faith and simplicity, come to see just how those things around us fit into the wider picture. We must see what it is that fills this space, the interrelationships between stone, water, wood, air, light, renewal. What we touch or feel at the lake is so different than other tactile sensations.

**Day Six: The Lake and the Past -** On your sixth visit to the lake we are focused on what cannot be seen. For example the most secret parts of the lake at the edges or the inner parts of the lake where the depth is greatest. Our imagination might again begin to consider what lies there. But look with an eye for movement, renewal and for growth. Observe patiently the quiet patterns of energy in these places, as something new emerges. Make a mental note of what it is you see? Leaves, birds, debris, reflections. What is it that holds your gaze out onto these more hidden parts of the lake? Do you have particular memories of other lakes in your life? Have these *‘earth’s eyes’* seen you at times at your best and, at times, at your worst. Lakes are offering us something continual in movement, a familiar pattern or outline of some order and balance in our lives. Perhaps you may wish to speak a thought or prayer, some simple and honest words of meaning from your heart

***‘Time wasted at the lake is time well spent’***

***(Unknown)***

**Day Seven: The Lake and Food -** Okay, perhaps this is the day visit that you’ve been waiting for! You could prepare a sandwich or drink or pick up a healthy snack before you set off. As long as you can spend between 15-30 mins at, or near, the lake and that you find a suitable spot to rest you will feel the benefits. The intention is to be solely in the company of the lake. Of course we know that the large natural lakes of this world are a great source of food supply. Lake Malawi holds up to 1000 species of fish, the largest number of fish species of any lake in the world. The lake before you might offer little in the way of supplies for local populations. If it is a park lake it might date back to Victorian ideas of adornment and proportion. Yet it presents an opportunity to breathe and to know our own bodies before nature, to slow down and to cherish the food we enjoy and to be thankful for the chance to rest and replenish! We are sharing in gratitude. How can this positive commitment to our environment be maintained?

**Day Eight : The Lake and Faith -** In the deep uncertainties and unknowns in our life we strive to follow the right course of action. This, in a simple sense, is an act of faith. Today we might reflect on our inner strength and convictions as we look out onto the lake again. Perhaps we hold no religious faith as such or perhaps we are open to new and fresh springs of hope and faith rising within us. In the following story we read of the storm on Lake Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee) a large freshwater lake in Israel. Consider the reaction of the disciples and the power of wind and storm upon any lake, the sense of chaos and danger such a storm can present on a lake so deep and expansive:

*‘One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they set out, and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, “Where is your faith?” And they were afraid, and they marvelled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?”*

**Day Nine : The Lake and Stillness -** On your visit to the lake today you are contrasting directly the levels of anxiety and stress we frequently feel in our lives with the stillness and the silence of the lake in our sight. The waters before us offer a balance. There is a perceivable perimeter and shape to the lake despite the rough borders and the rocks and pebbles showing through. Allow all preoccupations and concerns to melt away … as if they are joining the water’s surface. Allow for soft breath inhalations and exhalations and for thankfulness to take its root in us, thankful that spaces such as these exist! For some it might seem that time at the lake is truly wasted time. You maybe know somewhat different! There is a reason why you are before the lake today. Try not to work it out or over think it, just accept that you are in the right place at the right time. Our faculties – mind, heart, body and soul – are somehow ‘absorbed’ into a greater good. We are close to a sense of ‘Unity’.

**Day Ten: The Lake and Mercy -** Mercy extends its quiet and serene presence into the hard and the gritty experience of our daily life. You have spent now a number of hours at the side of the lake. You have looked at it afresh each day exploring key themes and ideas alongside your own inner strengths and weaknesses. You have become aware of both the ‘seen’ and the ‘unseen’, ‘the visible and invisible’ gifts of nature. Allowing the ‘unseen’ to touch us, its reach to calm and to restore our balance is working with the power of ‘mercy’. The ripples of mercy can take the burdens we carry away. Today the lake is a true friend; it has shared itself as you have shared something of yourself. You are working with ‘love’ over ‘loss’, ‘peace’ over ‘turbulence’. Today you will continue to shine mercy in all you go on to do! There are no questions to answer or questions to pose, only an overriding sense of this ‘mercy’!

**Night Eleven: The Lake and the Moon -** This is an evening or night visit! Please be vigilant and be careful if you are to set out in the dark. Of course it does not have to be in the early hours of the morning, but perhaps at later dusk or when the moon and stars become visible or partially visible in later evening. Think of all the lakes of the world as ‘the earth’s eyes’. Think of them spread across the earth’s surface. Some are natural freshwater lakes, some are man-made and artificial lakes. These scattered ‘eyes’ look up to the moon and to the stars, they look to light in the darkness. The moon and stars beam back and assure them that all is good; all is balanced and harmonious, in order. ‘Earth’s eyes’ rest, they close, they sleep within the workings of the universe. The lakes will appear very tranquil as darkness approaches. They have done their job for the day, fulfilled their role in watching out, engaging with the light and its source. Now there is just you, your vigilant eyes and the light of the moon and the stars. You too must return home and rest, tomorrow your eyes will open to see ‘new potential’ and ‘new possibility’. Sleep without worry or stress. Be safe. Be content.

**Day Twelve: The Lake and the Future -** You return to the lake one more time. There is a rootedness, a value embedded in all of nature. This includes our own human nature. We ask if we are, within ourselves, building a safe and secure place for growth and trust to dwell? For ‘presence’ and the ‘immediacy’ of nature to truly inform us? Let the old ways of thinking and behaving pass if you feel it necessary. The lake has presented new patterns of truth and mercy. Once you decide on new horizons, on a different future, you can grow in fortitude. Fortitude is linked to ‘integrity’, a true integrity that combines both the worldly and the eternal spheres. Therein lies progress, as we enter the very ‘light’ we watched unfold on the lake’s surface. We are closer to the ‘Spirit of God’ going forward. Our frustrations and matters close to our heart can so often boil over. The lake reminds us of the calm within our reach and its power to ‘look out’ in truth, not to continually ‘wrestle’ with untruths and false perceptions that fill up our heads!

You named your lake. From now on that lake will have a secondary name: ‘Lake Horizons’.

It is always within reach, because its smooth and silent waters have entered your heart.

It is a lake settled permanently within you as a ‘precious jewel’.

‘Lake Horizons’ is alive and close.

***‘In God, I can find all the beauty of valleys, lakes and panorama’s. One lives him, breathes him. My horizons widen day by day’***

***(St. Elizabeth of the Trinity)***