

Quaker Voices

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Cover photo: Sunset in Chile. Photo: Tony Stoller. Top of this page: Wild tulips, Andorra. Photo: Bob Ward. Inside back cover: Ness cherry blossom. Photo: Alison Leonard.

Dear Friends

I am not quite sure how we have come to this point in the year already. I feel like I no more than turned the calendar to 2013 and, suddenly, I find myself already at the end of January preparing to send the March issue to the printer.

Do you also have the feeling that the years are flying by more rapidly with each one that passes? My eldest grandson turns twenty-one this year, and his sister will be nineteen about the time you receive this issue. In the same way for the youngest grandchildren, the 'new' babies are now two and one and a half years old. Where did the time go?

At least, for me, this past week has felt more like a winter than the previous few. My home state of Pennsylvania usually has several inches, if not feet, of snow. I know that I am strange in liking snow but I do enjoy it. Driving in the aftermath of the snowstorm in the New Forest in the middle of December 2011 was fun (for me), and last year there was some snow in north London. However, the down side is that because the binmen were helping clear the roads our bins were not emptied this week so we are rather overflowing with black bags.

I hope that you enjoy the 'cinquains' from the article on all-age worship. One in particular struck me as appropriate for me to respond to as I am still shedding 'stuff' from the flat following our move – and there is still

Stuff
Never enough
Consumes our lives
Reclaim, untether, float-free
Fluff

more to go.



In Friendship,
Trish Carn, editor

Reclaiming the Bible for Liberal Friends

Marisa Johnson



I found Friends over twenty years ago. Like many others, I perceived it as a refuge from a Christianity that I felt I could not believe in with integrity. I was very thankful to have found a place where I could find fellowship and share my spiritual journey with congenial and diverse people, who accepted me just as I was and encouraged me to probe and develop. My own concept of God could probably be described as nontheist at that time.¹

I delighted in finding people who also practised the Quaker way, but came from different religious backgrounds, or from entirely secular ones. Rooted in Christianity, yes, but really ‘post-Christian’ is how I thought of myself, and how I saw the Society of Friends (note the omission of ‘Religious’ from the name – that is how I thought of it then, though now I have come to see *religious* as an essential attribute for a community of faith, distinct from a secular association or NGO).

The Bible did not feature very much in my religious practice and spiritual journey. My Catholic upbringing had used it piecemeal as a liturgical tool – we were never encouraged to read it systematically. I was very familiar with some of the stories and could even quote a lot of passages, but had no sense of the context and complexities of the

narratives, and was entirely ignorant of large parts of the Scriptures. Teaching was focused on the catechism, which had distilled all that we needed to know to live good lives. Yet, as a child of Vatican II, I did sense the excitement of new ways of approaching the faith, particularly with the introduction of the vernacular in the Mass and, at last, in translations of the Bible, which became more accessible for the first time to many Catholics.

A brief dalliance with an evangelical Church of England parish in Cambridge, which put the Bible at the centre of its worship, persuaded me that I could not call myself a Christian in the terms that they required. I, therefore, was most grateful to find Friends, and to think I could put Christianity, and the Bible, behind me for good.

It came as a bit of a shock to me that the Liberal tradition in the Quaker world is just a minority, that there were programmed and evangelical Friends in other parts of the world, and that even in the unprogrammed tradition there were many Friends who regarded themselves as 'traditionally' Christian, and who held the Bible in great regard. For a while I simply took the 'live and let live' approach. But when I had the good fortune to be employed by Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) I had to address both my ignorance of the Bible, and my attitudes towards it, if I was to serve appropriately the great diversity of Quakers in the world. I take this ministry very seriously – we cannot speak truth and reconciliation to a divided world if we do not embody and live such integration within our own community.

I was most fortunate to receive encouragement and coaching in reading the Bible from Janet Scott, who is known to many Friends as a scholar and an amazing teacher. Janet, Woodbrooke and other resources helped me to discover *through* the Bible fascinating and exciting messages of wholeness, justice, liberation and transformation. I guess my first insight was that the Bible is not to be itself the object of veneration – this could indeed be seen as idolatry – but it is the vessel through which a part of humankind – the part I happen to belong to – has expressed its evolving understanding of its relationship to the sacred. Suddenly, the choice for me was no longer to accept the Bible uncritically or reject it, but to engage with it, travel with it, explore with it, argue with it, and above all, use it as

a common language to communicate with the past, and with the present, within our own Quaker tradition, and ecumenically with those who share a Christian heritage, and also with those of other faiths or of no conscious faith. It gave me a 'place to stand in'.² I have come to believe that it is essential for the Liberal Quaker tradition to rediscover and reclaim its Biblical roots, alongside its exciting exploration of other traditions and alternative spiritual expression. As the recently retired general secretary of Friends World Committee for Consultation, Nancy Irving, never tired of reminding me – it does not have to be 'either or': it can be 'and, and'.

Most Quakers, of whatever tradition, would agree that Christianity is a way of life and not a series of dogmas to be believed uncritically. Liberal Friends would say that Quaker life is about following the promptings of love and truth as revealed in the heart of each person, and that these should be subject to testing within the community to avoid the danger of becoming subjective or expressing an individual's will rather than genuine spiritual insight. They would agree that Quakers are children of the light, and by 'walking in the light' they would mean acting with integrity according to what the light is showing them in their life, through a process of discernment. Many modern Liberal Quakers see these principles as sufficient, but early Friends saw these principles confirmed in their reading of the Bible.

George Fox's words sum up the distinctive Quaker approach to the Bible: *'This I was moved to declare, that the scriptures were given forth by the spirit of God and all people must first come to the spirit of God in themselves by which they might know God and Christ, of whom the prophets and the apostles learnt: and by the same spirit they might know the holy scriptures and the spirit which was in them that gave them forth; so that the spirit of God must be in them that come to know them again'*.³ Reading the Bible in the Spirit is a process of recognition, a confirmation of what we find if we first attend to the 'Inward Teacher'.

Isaac Pennington put it thus: *'And the end of words is to bring men to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter. So, learn of the Lord to make a right use of the Scriptures: which is by esteeming them in their right place, and prizing that above them which is above them'*.⁴

In other words, it is the living Word that continues to be spoken out

through people gathered in worship that has the ultimate authority, and it is the experience of encountering the Spirit revealed in each of us – just as Paul declared happened to him in Galatians 1:12 – that enables us to recognise that same Spirit being expressed by the writers of the many books that make up the Bible.

The Quaker approach to the Bible is therefore different from that of Catholic or Orthodox Christians, who rely on the authority of the Church and its leaders to interpret the Bible and develop doctrine for the ordinary people to believe and live by, and from the Protestant approach that developed after the Reformation, which placed authority in the written word itself, although different interpretations and emphases begat many separate traditions and sects.

Early Friends rejected selective readings of the Bible that precluded women's ministry, justified on the basis of New Testament texts.⁵ Such restrictions endure to this day in many mainstream churches. Friends did not feel bound by those texts but looked at the evidence of the Gospels that showed Jesus affirming the discipleship of Lazarus' sister Mary,⁶ the role played by women in the Gospel, from Jesus' birth through the maiden Mary, to the women accompanying him to the Cross and being the first witnesses to his resurrection, as well as Paul's reference to women's leadership in the early church.⁷ Similarly, the Catholic Church requires its priests to be unmarried and celibate, on a particular reading of Scripture, yet this is rejected by other mainstream churches, and indeed by Friends.

In Europe, we have painful memories of the Bible being used to perpetrate intolerable persecution against Jewish people, again with spurious Biblical justification.⁸ Early Friends, as well as other Christians, owned and traded slaves, and did not see for generations how grievously this offended against the Bible's teachings that the human being is made in the image of God⁹ until lone, prophetic voices such as John Woolman's rose to witness against these practices. Oppression, racism, and colonialism, even apartheid, have found justification in Bible verses among some Christians. Because of this history we need to be very vigilant about attempts at creating new scapegoats. This is evident today in the way the Bible is being used to justify prejudice against people

who do not conform to their ideas of sexual and gender norms. Some may be tempted to dismiss the Bible as a whole because of these toxic associations, or simply be selective about which parts of it to use or refer to. Yet it is within the Bible itself that we find a message of radical inclusion that goes beyond our notions of tolerance.

Yet dismissing the Bible is not the answer. Doug Bennett, president of Earlham College, said in an article entitled *Homosexuality: a plea to read the Bible together* published in *Friends Journal* (USA) in May 2012, ‘The rupture over the Bible is the deepest schism of all among Friends. We will not find our way to unity about homosexuality (or about a great many other matters) if we are not willing to talk seriously about the Bible together. We need to value the Bible together as a fount of spiritual authority, to be prepared to listen to one another’s leadings, and to be tender to different readings of what is a deep and complex revelation of God’s work among humankind.’ This does not mean that the Bible is the only source of spiritual authority – indeed the greatest strength of Liberal Quakerism is its flexibility and openness to other sources and teachings. But the Bible is part of our heritage and fundamental to a great part of the rest of the Quaker world. Similarly, in ecumenical encounters within Christianity we need to be Bible-literate in order to be able to hear and be heard. Hearts and minds – ours and those of others – can only be changed if we are able to enter into conversation in a mutually intelligible language.

It is time Liberal Friends, in the words of Marcus Borg, *redeemed the Bible and reclaimed Christian language*¹⁰ to become more effective bridge people enabling meaningful connections in the pluralist world in which we live. In doing so we could be following in Paul’s footsteps and, like him, reach out of our tradition to share a message of hope and healing for the world. We could be ‘Apostles to today’s Gentiles.’

Marisa Johnson is a member of Cambridgeshire Area Meeting.

Notes:

1. I now see both theism and nontheism as approaches to God’s mystery, akin to the *Via positiva* and *Via negativa* of the creation spiritual tradition of Meister Eckhart, two steps of a four-fold path

that also encompasses the *Via creativa* and the *Via transformativa* as described in *Meditations with Meister Eckhart* by Matthew Fox, Bear & Company 1983

2. F. Hogwill, quoted in *Quaker Faith and Practice* of Britain Yearly Meeting 19.08
3. Quoted by Rex Ambler in *Truth of the Heart*, Quaker Books 2001
4. Quoted in *Quaker faith and practice* of Britain Yearly Meeting 27.27
5. See I Corinthians 14:29–35 and I Timothy 2:11–15
6. See Luke 10:41–42
7. For instance, I Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:1–6
8. See John 8: 44
9. Genesis 1:27
10. Marcus Borg: *Speaking Christian: Recovering the lost meaning of Christian words*, HarperCollins

5. Take time to learn about other people's experiences of the Light. Remember the importance of the Bible, the writings of Friends and all writings which reveal the ways of God. As you learn from others, can you in turn give freely from what you have gained? While respecting the experiences and opinions of others, do not be afraid to say what you have found and what you value. Appreciate that doubt and questioning can also lead to spiritual growth and to a greater awareness of the Light that is in us all.

Quaker faith and practice 1.02.5

Quaker spirituality

Alison Leonard



Have you ever been to a Quaker Meeting for Worship?
I'll describe one to you.

About thirty-five people sit on comfortable, upright chairs in a circle in a plain, light room. There's some shuffling at first, but then a settling, a gathering. Now there is deep quiet. Some people have their eyes closed, some have them open. Someone may stare at the flowers on the table, another may pick up the red book called *Quaker faith and practice* (*Qf&p*) or a New Testament and read it for a while, then put it down. Nothing, apparently, is happening. After about forty minutes, a man suddenly speaks. He's sitting in a wheelchair, and is clearly very old. 'We have heard the Spirit talked of as Light,' he says. 'We experience it, here, as enlightenment, clarity. Have we also thought about what Light may be like when we pass into a more spiritual existence? How we might experience Light when there is no human physicality to obscure it? I believe that Light will also exist beyond the human, beyond this world.' There is a return to the silence, and it deepens. When people shake hands at the end, it seems to have been a very short hour.

Another occasion. A small number of people, perhaps a dozen, sit in a rather hideous, dingy building. The chairs are rickety, and creak at the slightest movement. A newcomer, who comes from a background of worshipping in churches filled with light, colour and dignified ritual, sits down uncomfortably. Against all expectations, he feels held by the love that passes understanding, and realises that in the journey he is making, he is not alone. He is together with friends who, like him, are moving inwards towards a connectedness that can only be a signal of transcendence.

The Quaker way of worship began in the ferment that followed the English Civil War. In 1660, Alexander Parker wrote: ‘The first that enters into the place of your meeting... turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong. Then the next that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness.’

A Friend of the twentieth century put it thus: ‘The treasure I found seemed startlingly simple, and I held this treasure quietly to myself, exploring its significance, feeling it almost too good to be true. Part of its simplicity was that I and others were to start just where we were at the moment and proceed at our own pace from there. How blessed that there were no restraints of belief. The promptings of love and truth were the starting places and we could move at our own pace to recognise them as the leadings of God – the beyond which drew me and others on from our limitations and despairs and smallnesses.’

You’ll understand from these descriptions that Quaker spirituality is mystical, rather than scriptural. Indeed, one of the most significant of early Quakers, William Penn, said, ‘The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious and devout souls are everywhere of one religion.’ From the same period comes this from Isaac Penington: ‘For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and life in him, and that he walks in his rank, in his own order, in his proper way and place of subjection to that; and this is far more pleasing to me than if he walked just in that track wherein I walk.’ On this day, I’ll read that passage again in the way Isaac Penington might have written it today: ‘For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that a woman walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and life in her, and that she walks in her proper way; and this is far more pleasing to me than if she walked just in that track wherein I walk.’

Out of the silence comes, sometimes, spoken ministry. ‘Ministry is what is on one’s soul, and it can be in direct contradiction to what is on one’s mind. It’s what the Inner Light gently pushes you toward or suddenly dumps in your lap. It is rooted in the eternity, divinity and selflessness

of the Inner Light; not in the worldly, egoistic functions of the conscious mind.' 'To some are granted deeper spiritual discoveries and revelations than to others, but to all, waiting in expectancy, at moments and in some measure is given a sense of the living touch of God.' (*Qf&p* 2.66 & 67.)

Out of worship comes community. 'True worship may be experienced at any time; in any place – alone on the hills or in the busy daily life – we may find God... But this individual experience is not sufficient, and in a meeting held in the Spirit there is a giving and receiving between its members, one helping another with or without words. So there may come a wider vision and a deeper experience' (*Qf&p* 2.11).

From worship, too, may come 'leadings'. Gordon Matthews, a modern Friend, writes: 'If we dwell in the presence of God, we shall be led by the spirit... God is always there to lead us. We need to be willing to be led into the dark as well as through green pastures and by still waters.' *Quaker faith and practice* affirms: 'From the beginning Friends believed that they could have direct and immediate communication with God which would enable them to discern right ethical choices.' John Woolman, who lived in a slave-owning American state in the mid-eighteenth century, became clerk to a lawyer and recorded one experience thus: 'A neighbour desired me to write his will: I took notes, and, amongst other things, he told me to which of his children he gave his young negro. I considered the pain and distress he was in, and knew not how it would end, so I wrote his will, save only that part concerning his slave, and carrying it to his bedside, read it to him, and then told him in a friendly way, that I could not write any instrument by which my fellow-creatures were made slaves, without bringing trouble on my own mind... Then we had a serious conversation on the subject, and at length, he agreeing to set her free, I finished his will.' The *Quaker Advices & Queries*, the only part of our literature which is required reading within the community, says: 'Seek to know an inward stillness, even amid the activities of daily life. Do you encourage in yourself and in others a habit of dependence on God's guidance for each day? ...Spiritual learning happens throughout life, and often in unexpected ways.'

From worship, and from being in community, come 'testimonies': principles that help us to live our lives properly. At the moment, these

testimonies are called Truth and Integrity, Simplicity, Equality, Justice and Peace, and there is a recent addition, a testimony to the Earth. Quaker principles lead to practical action.

Another principle is that of *change*. The world changes; we change; that which lives, changes, and that which does not change, dies. 'Think it possible that you may be mistaken' is an advice, and it's followed by a query: 'Do you approach new ideas with discernment?' The concept of *discernment* is at the heart of Quaker decision-making. Even the most fundamental aspects may be questioned. For instance, you will have noticed the emphasis on Light, the Inner Light. Yet in *Quaker faith and practice*, revised in the 1990s, the astrophysicist and lifelong Quaker Jocelyn Bell Burnell writes: 'As we try to cope with the anger, the pain and grief that come through some unhappy experience, we can learn a lot about the less well-articulated, darker sides of our personality. These darker aspects should not be ignored. Although we tend to equate evil with darkness, we should remember that in the plant world, roots grow in the dark. Darkness (and shadows) are as much a part of the natural order as light.'

To return to the central practice of Friends, the Meeting for Worship. Two more descriptions from *Quaker faith and practice*:

10.09. We were meeting in the long sitting-room, and the floor-space was as usual filled by the children. The room was pretty full. Then Sophie's father came and put her in her carry-cot on the floor. She was very young, and we hadn't expected to be greeting her so soon. I looked around the adults, wondering which of us would minister. The bringing of a baby to Meeting is one of the rare occasions when spoken ministry is generally planned in advance. At the other end of the room Lizzie, aged three, slipped down from her mother's knee. Slowly, carefully, and mostly upright she clambered in and out, past all the other children. She reached the carry-cot and peeped in at the baby. Then she turned and gave everyone a smile of pure delight. Still smiling, she returned to her mother. Nobody else spoke either. Sophie had been welcomed into Meeting.

2.53. A score of years ago a friend placed in my hand a little book which became one of the turning points of my life. It had but one thought:

that God was waiting in the depths of my being, to talk to me if only I would get still enough to hear that voice. I thought this would be a very easy matter, and so I began to get still. But I had no sooner commenced than a perfect pandemonium of voices reached my ears, a thousand clamouring notes from without and within, until I could hear nothing but their noise and din. In every direction I was pushed and pulled, and greeted with noisy acclamations of unspeakable unrest. But God said, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Then came the conflict of thoughts for the morrow, its duties and cares; but God said, 'Be still'. And as I listened, and slowly learned to obey, I found after a while that there was a still, small voice in the depths of my being that began to speak with an inexpressible tenderness, power and comfort.

Now, this is a university, an academic institution. So you will be interested in the theology of this mystical-but-practical Quaker way. Quaker theology is both distinct, and radical.

First, it is non-credal. If spiritual learning continues throughout life, then it cannot be bound by a form of words. If I'm asked what Quakers believe, I always try to include a pithy saying I heard long ago from a wise old Quaker: 'If you believe something, it should show in your life. If it doesn't show in your life, then why bother to declare it?'

Second: 'When early Friends affirmed the priesthood of all believers it was seen as an abolition of the priesthood; in fact it is an abolition of the laity. All members are part of the clergy and have the clergy's responsibility for the maintenance of the meeting as a community.' (*Quaker faith and practice*, chapter 11.)

Third, it is highly disciplined. If you feel led to some particular work or service, you don't immediately go out and do it; you test it against the traditions and practices of Friends, and with the members of your own Meeting. Decision-making is regarded as part of worship: Quaker meetings for business are held within worshipful silence and steady deliberation, each one listening to others for the truth in what they are saying. Discernment comes with these instructions: 'Consider difficult questions with an informed mind and a generous and loving spirit.' In Quaker decision-making, there should be no lobbying beforehand or

grouching afterwards. Decisions are minuted within the meeting, and upheld by all, whether they were present or not. (It must be said that what I'm describing is perfection. The book *Quaker by Convincement*, by Geoffrey Hubbard, contains the index entry: *perfect, Quakers not.*)

Fourth, its radicalism arises from the heart of Quaker belief and practice: the principle that there is 'that of God in everyone'. If 'that of God' is everywhere, and in everyone, then it is everyone's task to discern it and respect it. The ways that deny it – greed, war, slavery, torture – must be opposed; hierarchies questioned; half-truths challenged; and truth and love everywhere sought.

There are at present about 20,000 Quakers in Britain. Not many – and maybe because this is a hard way. There's no sitting in the back pew.

So – back to worship. We sit in a circle, in silence and allow God to reach us and transform us. 'We have found that the Spirit, if rightly followed, will lead us into truth, unity and love.' We'll now leave the chapel and walk, in silence if you can, to the Senior Common Room where we will have about thirty minutes of Quaker worship.

*Alison Leonard is a member of Chester Meeting.
This article is from a talk she gave at the
Chester University Chaplaincy in November 2012.*

We know the power of God's Spirit at work in the lives of people within the community of our meetings. These people may have been drawn into the community by a sudden convincement, a long period of seeking, or have grown up within it from childhood. We also know that we are engaged in a life-long growth into faith, and experience a continuing irruption of grace into our lives which demands and sustains a commitment to a life of discipleship. We recognise this power at work in people of all ages, races and creeds: a transforming power which can issue in lives of joy, humility and service.

*London Yearly Meeting, 1986
Quaker faith and practice 10.02*

First time in Meeting

Listen to the new attender
quaking near the outer door.
'Should I leave or should I enter?
Help me Lord, I can't be sure.'

Heard these Quakers sit in silence
maybe for a whole long hour
seeking something from their
worship
finding in themselves some power.

Shall I try it out this morning?
can my stillness last so long ?
can I learn without a sermon?
can I worship without song?

Heard that Quakers have no vicar,
deacon, pastor, priest or nun.
So who checks on what they're
thinking?
who decides how things are run?

Heard they travel down to London
where they meet for suffering.
Are they forced to undergo this?
Sounds a rather dangerous thing!

Someone's standing in the entrance
'Welcome Friend and do come in.'
Well, I'll see what happens to me
Worshipping will soon begin.

Here's a seat in that dark corner
tucked away beside the wall.
If I take it I can hide there
quietly joining with them all.

Well, the hour's gone by so quickly
Ministry it spoke to me.
Peace and love and understanding,
followed by a cup of tea.

Maybe here I'll find an answer
growing stronger day by day
finding faith from deep inside me
seeking for a better way.

*Jane Robinson is from Bolton
Meeting. The poem was first
published in Reflections from Pendle
Hill Autumn News 2012*

Quaker Meetings and their little ways!

David Sanders and Juli Salt

General chat around our residential meeting at Pluscarden threw up some points along the lines that often new, and sometimes not-so-new, members and attenders didn't always know routine Quaker protocol. Since we are often expected to acquire information by osmosis, and after all we are not plants, this is hardly surprising.

Do Friends know not to walk into a room when someone is speaking or ministering in either Business Meeting or Meeting for Worship (MfW) but to wait quietly by the door until they have finished – and to pause for a few seconds before entering? What about the time our meetings begin! If a meeting is timed to start at, say, 10.30 am – that is not the time of arrival: it is the time that we are all settled. Traditionally, when the first person is seated in a state of quiet contemplation or prayer, the meeting has begun. Where the meeting has the use of only one room, of course Friends will tend to gather first and then all sit down together. Where we are lucky enough to have a separate room for our Meeting for Worship (MfW) – even a meeting house (wow!) – Friends can sit down when they are ready. In some meetings there are a few Friends who will settle a quarter of an hour before the advertised start of the meeting to 'warm up the meeting room' – a sort of ministry in itself.

How many new to our Area Business Meetings realise that these should be conducted in the same vein as our MfW's – prayerfully seeking God's guidance – somewhat challenging when we get lost on nitty-gritty stuff I admit!! This discernment depends on openness and hearing different points of view, all within a loving community.

Juli speaking said:

Reflecting back for myself I reckon it was after some fifteen years of membership, at a Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) session, when the penny dropped that when Friends said ‘I hope so’ in a business meeting they were saying ‘Yes’ rather than uttering from a position of sheer boredom. This time-honoured ‘I hope so’ is a response to the clerk’s question, ‘Is this minute acceptable?’ In other words, ‘It’s good enough for me – others may feel differently about it.’

It took even longer for me, until I was serving on Meeting for Sufferings, to realise that one should not stand to speak once the clerk was writing a minute but that one should be sitting and upholding the clerk prayerfully. Normally it is obvious when the clerk is either looking down at the table, writing, or talking to an assistant clerk, that they are busy. When he or she looks up from the table, then may be the time to stand again.

Do we understand that when with the agreement of the meeting the clerk begins to draft a minute, this means that we are no longer holding a discussion about the item of business in hand? Having got as far as we can for the time being, we are now recording the discussion already held. The task is now to make a good enough record of the meeting’s discernment rather than to continue that discernment.

Oh and here’s a nice quirky one – started very recently, I think, by younger Friends: when someone holds their hand/arm up high, this means ‘please, will the rest of you be quiet’. This is usually because someone needs to say something and not try shrieking above the din, but also amazingly effective at BYM, like a wave going around about a thousand Friends, to draw them into the silence to begin the meeting. Of course, in the delight and excitement of the moment at seeing old acquaintances, all the above advice has been totally forgotten – because, of course, Friends, we are only human, not plants.

*Juli Salt & David Sanders are the Eldership and Oversight Committee
Co-convenors for North of Scotland Area Meeting*

Making a difference

Peggy Heeks



Perhaps you remember the story of the girl tossing back into the sea starfish which had been washed up on the shore. 'You won't make much difference doing that' commented an onlooker. The girl's response was to throw another starfish into the sea, saying 'Well, it made a difference to that one'. This theme was picked up recently at an ecumenical conference in Oxford called 'Making a difference'.

Quakers often feel that they're at the forefront of social witness, with their testimonies to equality, peace etc, and now, latterly, to sustainability. Perhaps, indeed, we have become a bit proud of the record. If so, it was salutary to hear of the considerable activity of other Oxfordshire churches.

Each participant had been asked to fill in a coloured card, saying what individuals and churches were doing to make a difference, locally or globally. The cards were placed in a large display area, and I made time to read each one. One purpose of the day was celebration. It's so easy to get full of gloom about the woes of the world, an attitude that just saps the energy from us. There was plenty on the cards to offset that. Some of the work was quite simple: visiting lonely people or helping in a charity shop. Some was much more substantial: running workshops on managing

finances, training lay pastors, or arranging services and discussion in a care home.

There was evidence of concern for the future of our planet, but the actual range was wide. Some churches were focused on work with prisoners, a few on asylum seekers. Others worked to support disabled people. Probably most participants were surprised by the scope of churches' social witness, and it emerged that often we weren't aware of the experience and skills on our own patch. There is a case for establishing data bases to make such information easily available. Social needs span denominations as does the take-up on church-based events.

In a world where negative stories tend to dominate the headlines, it's valuable to pause, take stock and celebrate the positive aspects. The core message of the conference stretches far beyond Oxfordshire. It is that we each have a gift, however modest. Our responsibility is to use it to make a difference.

Something else, though, lingers from the day. It's relatively easy for churches to turn to social work, in fulfilling their vision. It is limitless in scope, with its impact fairly easy to judge. Yet it may divert us from a core role of the church: to increase awareness of the life of the spirit, to encourage that closeness to God which Jesus longed for. George Fox saw two streams in Quakerism: the mystic and the prophetic. Let us not forget the mysterious spirit within and around us, which helps us become instruments of love.

Peggy Heeks is a member of Oxford & Swindon Area Meeting.

Our strength or help is only in God; but then it is near us, it is in us - a force superior to all possible opposition - a force that never was, nor can be foiled. We are free to stand in this unconquerable ability, and defeat the powers of darkness; or to turn from it, and be foiled and overcome. When we stand, we know it is God alone upholds us; and when we fall, we feel that our fall or destruction is of ourselves.

Journal of Job Scott, 1751-1793
Quaker faith and practice 20.02

So what makes The Retreat distinctively Quaker?



Bronwen Gray

Founded by a Quaker tea merchant, William Tuke, in 1792, The Retreat remains to this day a Quaker organisation. Although established for Quakers, the hospital today is open to all, and we rarely have Quaker patients. The staff group, too, includes just a handful of Quakers. So how, might you ask, is the Quaker light shining at The Retreat today?

Our governance has a strong Quaker flavour, with the majority of our Directors being Quakers, and a twenty-four-strong body of Quakers, known as The Retreat General Meeting. Our senior management team is very sympathetic to the Quaker way, and includes one Quaker.

But what has engaged some of us over the past twelve months is what makes us distinctively Quaker. Members of the General Meeting act as guardians of The Retreat's Quaker roots. But in what way are we different from other hospitals offering a similar service? Some people walk into the building and are struck by the atmosphere: calm and peaceful. Is it right to claim that as something 'Quaker?'

We know that company directors and Members can't do it alone, but their influence is certainly strong at present. With their support, in August 2011 we set up a Quaker Group, comprised of Quaker staff, a former Quaker patient, a director and a member, and along with the chief

Quaker voices

executive, we have tried to tease out what it means to be distinctively Quaker.

As part of our work we have talked to other Quaker organisations, and relished the chance in 2011 to take part in a threshing meeting held at Woodbrooke in which the very same questions were pondered. Our chief executive, Jenny McAleese, is a member of the Quaker heads group, and others in our group attend Quakers and Business meetings. One of the strong messages that has come out of these groups is that we are not walking this journey alone: other Quaker organisations are wrestling with these same questions.

We looked at our Quaker testimonies and the extent to which we live them out here. We decided that the place to focus our energy was our existing organisational values, which we didn't feel had anything distinctively Quaker about them. We drew up a draft which in part reflected our Quaker testimonies, but we hoped was real for the context in which we work.

We're working towards more equality, but what about simplicity in a large and complex hospital? Yes, we do think about ethical investment and don't use Lottery funding, but we can't avoid having large disparities in salary because we want to attract high quality medical staff. And yes,



we do have a Green Group and think about our carbon footprint, but we care for unwell, vulnerable people who may need heating on all year. And yes, we hold our Quaker spiritual values dear and hold regular worship here, but as a hospital we can't impose our Quakerism on anyone, and it's really important that we respect people of other faiths – or of none.

We consulted the staff group on our revised draft values: equality and community; honesty and integrity; hope; courage; care for the environment; and peace. We attached behaviours to each value, as a first step to thinking about how we live out the values in the workplace. Importantly, we added a page about our Quaker roots, showing where it all came from, and emphasising the spiritual roots underpinning our testimonies.

The feedback from staff was clear: they liked the fact that the 'spiritual stuff' was in the preamble, but not part of the values. They rightly said that we can't impose our spirituality, even though we can promote our values. They liked the tenor of the values, but felt that we weren't really doing it yet. This has been a humbling experience, but we hear and understand the messages and they have been a catalyst to change. Our thinking now is clearer: we need to put in place a range of processes to ensure that we are all making a real attempt to live our values.

The whole exercise has helped us highlight what we already do well which could be called distinctively Quaker, for example, staff and patients using first names instead of titles. Most importantly, we have shone some light in the darker areas, and hope this can, in time, help the light to shine all the more brightly here as well.

*Bronwyn Gray is a member of York Area Meeting
and resident Quaker at The Retreat.*

Making space for the Spirit

Contributed by Catherine Brown

What are Advices? 'Unadorned, challenging questions or statements designed to provoke deeper reflection upon our relationship with God and the world, both as individuals and as a community.'

Becoming Friends

The Mid-Thames Area Meeting recently held an Adult Gathering at Charney Manor based on 'Making Space for the Spirit'. As part of this we were asked – if we were moved to – to produce 'Advices' based on a series of reflections that we read. This was a very moving and deep experience, and some of the output I found really quite powerful. The following Advices grew from our work together.

1. Accept the paradox that we most need prayer when we are full of doubt.
2. Mindful simplicity is a gift from God to be treasured and to light our lives.
3. Listen, and be prepared to be transformed and to share in the transformation of the world.
4. At times when prayer seems pointless and there seems no-one, nothing to accept it, remember that prayer is not only what we give: it is also about what we accept, it is not only about talking to God, crucially it is also about listening to God.
5. Submit all your actions to the direction of love.
6. Let us not be afraid to melt into the love of God within ourselves and with one another. Let us not be afraid to inhabit together the

worshipful space which expands from inside out and wraps around us as a group and as a community.

7. Do others feel your words and actions as the visible presence and transformation of the grace of God in their lives?
8. Stand up and speak your prayer aloud – ditch your embarrassment. It is meant for you in that moment and not open to others' judgement – yes, it is a statement of faith or doubt – your statement to God and to the community you are amongst.
9. Are your lives trivial and mediocre? Are you pre-occupied with money – status – work? If your eternal soul focused on God, was in charge of your life, what would be different?
10. True love exceeds all expectations. It branches out in all aspects of our lives in positive ways. It eases our relationship with others.
11. Have faith in the wisdom of God's love. Wait in the presence of this love, and let it be your teacher and guide in all aspects of your life. This is a discipline that is asked of us.
12. Do not leave the development of God's Kingdom on Earth to chance. Be open to what might be, identify together what can be, and make the time to act.
13. Enjoy loving the world and your fellow man, and enjoy being loved.
14. Loving yourself often seems harder than loving others, yet unless we can know ourselves to be part of that divine spirit how can we truly see it in others?
15. Be true to yourself, remember what is important, and let your life reflect this.
16. Let Friends be mindful of how they receive loving expressions from others: if love makes us vulnerable and afraid, let us not return it to the benefactor in anger. Propagating an ability to accept love allows us to participate in the Covenant of Christ.
17. Loving kindness, given openly, particularly to those with whom you disagree or find irksome, is the true beginning of understanding the nature of God.

Quaker voices

18. The value of prayer is that it affords us the opportunity, whatever our state of mind, to tap into the main spring and well of the reality underlying all life.
19. The most touching ministry can be simple and silent. The warmth of your smile and the generosity of your spirit will bring comfort and light to others.
20. Hold on to those things in life you truly love, and do not love the things you desire to hold.
21. Love one another. This is the essential action that can bind the human race together for the benefit of everyone. All you need is love. Everything else follows.
22. Be prepared to leave aside your mass of petty projects and with your fellows contribute to the greater purposes of the Eternal.
23. Love is total acceptance of reality – there is no other.
24. Ministry from the heart, simply spoken, transcends all boundaries.
25. Let go of false gods and hold on to the gifts and treasures that are eternal.
26. Early Quakers had a common experience and a common language. Today we articulate this experience in a multiplicity of ways. Listen to each other with an open heart.
27. Prayer is an acknowledgment of our need for help and a recognition that we may be called to action.
28. Speak from the heart and with words that everyone can understand.

*Catherine Brown is a member of Mid-Thames Area Meeting.
As stated in the introduction the Advices and queries
were from a group exercise. Catherine submitted them.*

Lessons from the Oncology Ward: Four

The joy of simple things

Maretta Stark

As this will be my last contribution from the Oncology Ward, I thought it would be useful to include a checklist on what to bring on future occasions.

- Lip salve – recycled hospital air is very drying
- Body lotion – ditto
- Hand lotion – ditto
- Nail clippers and emery board – nails seem to grow more quickly on inactive bodies
- Wet wipes for coping with sticky fingers
- Mouth fresheners – peppermints, Tic-Tacs – to cope with parrot's cage mouth
- Pillows from home – hospital ones can be hard
- Patterned pillowcases – so they don't get swept up into the hospital laundry
- Bedside clock – the next patient's curtains often obscure the ward clock
- Puzzle books, code-breakers, sudoku, crosswords...
- Very light reading matter – concentration is delicate!

The next items are gender-specific. The boys will have to supply their own advice.

- Plenty of nighties or pyjamas. NB. It is easier to get out of bed in a seemly fashion in a ward full of visitors, if the said nightie is not skimpily cut!

- Plenty of underpants
- Tena panty liners – even if one doesn't have 'oops' moments, it helps to cut down the washing

The Oncology Ward at the Churchill Hospital does provide tissues and incontinence pads and pants, and does allow flowers in the ward. My bed was situated next to the loo, and so there was many an occasion when it was useful to bury my nose in the honeysuckle! At least being situated so conveniently (ahem) had its advantages. I hadn't realised that, after a kidney operation, any elimination of fluid is of supreme interest to the medics – no matter how pathetic the volume or repulsive the hue. My urine changed from the soft pink of rose wine, to the rich brown of sweet sherry, through the deep green of virgin olive oil to a more subtle shade of yellow tinged with green.



Sue Mynall

However, every drop had to be measured, so therefore, had to be kept in a bedpan until the care assistant could see to it. What a relief to be told, 'No more bedpans!'

It was after a period of painful constipation, when even the news seemed to be full of nothing but austerity and loss of output, that we had a real treat. I should explain that from our window we looked down on a

well formed by four exterior walls, where there were a few shrubs planted. What a priceless treat to hear the beautiful song of a visiting blackbird! I don't know if the song was of love or sadness, but it gave human hearts a warm glow that morning.

However, nothing can beat the sheer exhilaration and sweetness of the feel of fresh air on the skin after a long spell 'inside'! It was almost intoxicating, like being a small child at the seaside for the first time. It was so inspiring that, on leaving the hospital carrying my NHS walking stick and papier-mâché sick bowl (shaped like a top hat when inverted), I just couldn't help breaking into a song and dance routine!

Lesson and Blessing for Today: the greatest joys may be found in the simplest things.

*Maretta Stark was a member of Oxford Meeting.
She died on 5 August 2012.*

Sue Mynall is an attender at Oxford Meeting.

41. Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. Do not be persuaded into buying what you do not need or cannot afford. Do you keep yourself informed about the effects your style of living is having on the global economy and environment?

Quaker faith and practice 1.02.41

Prayers

*Memories on one pile
prayers on the next*

Class rehearsal over,
emotions too awkward
to carry round
are set aside.
Words that don't fit
into small lives
are forgotten
for a while, but
in their heads a new freedom they can't express runs wild.
Grown-ups
take the sadness
shape it into loss.
No-one knows
quite what to say
but say it quietly
to God.

Eve Jackson is a member of Hampshire & the Islands Area Meeting.



Are we a Religious Society?

David Parlett

When we presented our 2012 spiritual review of our local meeting to area meeting in November 2013 I couldn't help feeling that something was missing, despite its otherwise uplifting message. I now realise that we missed a question that another of our local meetings asked themselves in basing their response on themes suggested by *Advices & queries*, namely: 'How do you interpret your faith in the light of our Christian heritage?'

For all our talk of spiritual nourishment, and spirituality in general, there was nothing relating to this key question, nor indeed to anything that might be described as 'religious' as distinct from 'spiritual'. And yet the church we belong to calls itself the Religious, not the Spiritual, Society of Friends. So have we forgotten something, or are we misnamed?

By coincidence (or perhaps not) this topic struck me twice more during the following week. The first was while completing a questionnaire for this year's Church Census, which primarily asked how many attended for worship on a given date. No problem; I always count, and on that particular day did so very carefully. But this was followed by other, trickier, questions. The trickiest was: "How many of your congregation are committed to the Christian faith?". I long vacillated between "0%", since the question carries theological implications we might not all subscribe to, and '100 per cent'. Eventually I settled on 100 per cent.

Surprised? I hope not, because I went on to qualify it by adding '(100

per cent) acknowledge and seek to follow the example of Jesus.' I can't imagine anyone who regularly worships with us doubting this, bearing in mind paragraph 4 of *Advices & queries*:

'The Religious Society of Friends is rooted in Christianity and has always found inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus. How do you interpret your faith in the light of this heritage? How does Jesus speak to you today? Are you following Jesus' example of love in action?'

A few days later, over coffee after meeting for worship, the suggestion arose at my table that we are not in fact a Religious Society but a Spiritual one. I dissented; but of course much hangs on one's definition of 'religious'. To that Friend, 'religious' necessarily implied 'dogma' and priestly hierarchy, whereas 'spiritual' implied a form of personal or individual faith and practice. To me, 'religious' does not necessarily imply a credal religion but rather the binding together of spiritual individuals into a community united in the exploration of a shared faith and practice. (The word 'religion' is often traced back to the Latin for a binding together, which is an apt image, though the etymology is now disputed.) It was also said that religion implies theology, and Quakers don't do theology. Again I dissent; not just with Barclay's *Apology* in mind, but because theology fundamentally means no more than talking about God, or, to stretch a point, sharing reflections on our spiritual life and interpretation of experience. Given that definition, I don't think we do enough theology and I wish we did more of it.

(Here I struggle to resist a temptation to plough into the thicket of theist/nontheist debate currently exercising writers to *the Friend*. If I tend to label myself nontheist, it is not because I don't believe in God; it is because the sort of God I believe in transcends definition in everyday terms. In this respect I feel a link to Thomas Aquinas and the concept of *via negativa*, which is worth looking up if only in Wikipedia.)

I conclude by endorsing a letter in *the Friend* of 23 November 2013 from Gordon Steel, which with his agreement I summarise as: 'Are we ceasing to be a Religious Society of Friends and becoming merely a Friendly Society of well-meaning People?'

David Parlett is a member of South London Area Meeting.

Cinquain all age worship

Amy Ellis



Every six months our Meeting aims to have an All-Age Worship. In our meeting it is the responsibility of the children's committee to organise. We try to think of simple yet effective ideas that encourage and enable all to participate.

In December 2012 we came up with an idea of a 'Giving Tree'. One of its aims was to encourage reflection on giving and receiving of nonmaterial gifts.

To channel and broaden contemplation upon this theme we aimed to use the medium of a short succinct poem called a didactic cinquain. This is an informal poem taught in some primary schools favoured by young and older poets alike for its expressive simplicity.

A 'didactic cinquain' is a five-lined poem (from the French word for five 'cinq') that follows a pattern according to the number of words used, as opposed to a 'crapsey cinquain', which follows the number of syllables (Adelaide Crapsey, 1878-1914, was the inventor of this form of cinquain).

The dictates of the poem are: the first line is a one-word title, the subject of the poem; the second is a pair of adjectives, describing that title; the third line is a three-word phrase that gives more information about the subject; the fourth line consists of four words describing feelings related to that subject; and the fifth line is a single-word synonym or other reference for the subject from line one. They also looked rather like Christmas trees when centred and printed.

We spent one session running through these ideas with the children.

They wrote a few cinquains, one of which is:

Rectangles
Not squares
Squares are enemies!
But if we all
Collaborated

Turtle
Don't hurtle
Through your life
Slow down for once
Finally
(God's letter to turtles)



The Giving Tree

The next stage of planning the all-age worship was to prepare some shapes from thin card to hang on our tree. The children made a few during the preparatory session. Later a Friend and I sat together one morning with shape-cutters, scissors and wool and created a large selection of tree, heart and circle shapes.

The last things needed were a few branches suitable for hanging the shapes on. I had asked a couple of people and looked around a friend's farm but with no luck. Then a random chat to a neighbour led to several freshly pruned buddleia cuttings. Soon after, a walk to school with my children led to us noticing a damaged branch with yellow berries that was half-hanging off its tree. I thought, if it comes off easily I will use it, and indeed it virtually fell off into my hands. Why worry, I wondered, when the universe provides.

The meeting was getting ready too, the idea of the all-age worship had been approved by the elders, the date had been set and there had been a couple of notices about it in the previous weeks. On the morning, our family arrived early, and with the help of my three children spread out the shapes and pencils on alternate chairs. The children's low table was carried in from the children's room and extra pens and paper were laid out for them. Cushions and low chairs were placed around the table. My daughter

and I then carefully arranged the branches in a Christmas tree holder trying to make them as stable as possible, and placed them in the centre of the meeting room closest to the door. The scene was set.

Friends arrived, the meeting began, and even before the introduction, that I was saving to read after fifteen minutes when latecomers settle, one person stood and read out their cinquain. The cinquain gift was given to a child to hang up on the tree. Then a few minutes later came another, and after five more minutes another – all were different, all unique, all mind-opening and thought-provoking. The late arrivals sat down and I introduced the activity for those who were unsure of what to do and the children passed unclaimed cards and pencils to the adults who requested them.

Slowly and rhythmically the cinquains were shared and their themes were as diverse as the people the meeting contains. They included prisons, materialism, tenderness, nature, birds in flight, compassion, love and peace.

In addition, the meeting was blessed with the presence of a newborn baby who inspired two cinquains:

Baby
 my daughter
 my absolute delight
 smiling, gobbling, staring, alert,
 Beautiful.

Baby,
 cuddly, alert
 Gift of Love
 Tender, hopeful, fragile, miraculous
 Jesus

Some young children stood to share their wonderful contributions, some of which followed formats of their own.

Peace is a great life,
 it is our greatest love.
Written by a child age 6

Remember
 A Friend

Mouse
 Your house
 Is too small
 Make it big, tall
 Please!

Human
 My house
 Is very small.
 I like it that way

Love the beautiful world and its nature
 Open your eyes to each and every creature
 Vast numbers endure pollution
 Everybody could make a resolution

And a mother wrote one about her child who was giving quiet ministry

throughout most of the meeting!

Family
Amazing, frustrating
Filling my days
Sharing, supporting, consuming, inspiring
Life

When the hour was up, people shook hands and to finish it off perfectly
the Friend who gives notices stood and said:

Notices
Informing, sharing
What's happening here
Useful, relevant, interesting, hopefully
Welcome

Cinquains were everywhere!

I can recommend this idea for an all age worship as it is easy to organise and encourages people who do not often minister to do so. It brings the meeting together in an equal way as both children and adults alike can write cinquains and reading them after it is hard to tell an adults from a child's. We now have a collection of inspirational poems to use in our newsletter and on display on one of our notice boards. Enjoy writing your cinquains!

Amy Ellis is a member of Cambridge Jesus Lane Meeting.

More of the cinquain offerings follow.

Imagine
Thinking, changing
Challenge the world
Think outside the box
Believe

Compassion
Seeing, understanding
Sharing others' pain
Difficult, upsetting, important, hopeful
Progress

Prisons
Caged, angry
How to survive?
Fight? Submit? Learn? Start change?
Opportunity

Equality
Two people
From different backgrounds
Listening to each other
Friendship

Gift
Small, perfect
Given with love
Oooh! Wow! Aaah! Thanks
Present

Hug
Collective, supportive
Not only now
Unity, warmth, peace, love
Embrace

Pomegranate
Delicious, tasting
Absolutely never wasting
Numerous, wonderful, pleasure- filled
Seeds

Gentleness
Enfolding softly
Spirit's special way
Nurturing, stillness, releasing tightness
Peace

Sleep
Deep, refreshing
Recharging one's batteries
Tired, weary, awake, rested
Renewal

Perseverance
Diligent, ending
Striving in adversity
Commitment, hope, faith and effort
Patience

Riddles
Amazing, puzzling
Seeking life's meaning
Wonder, uncertainty, challenge, endeavour
Questions

Gathering
Pebbles from
The sand and beach
Touching their vivid colours
Treasures

Light
Shining, brightly
Coming from within
Given in equal measure
Gloriously

Trees
Leafy branches
Cleaning our air
Fruit, berries, flowers, colour
Wonderful

Geese
God's creation
Flying, migrating south
Wildness, freedom, joy, beauty
Heredity

Meeting
Quiet, patient
Waiting in silence
For the word of God
Yearning

People
Growing old
Needn't grow up
Be young at heart
Live!

Advent
December month
Waiting on God
Are you ready yet?
Expectation

The ingenious uses of air

Delighted to find our historic House
close wrapped in bubblewrap, a Yuletide gift
from 1675. (Well, also a mack
for new render in our relentless wet).

Light still shafts through long white window tunnels.
Oak in its squarehead nails steady as rock.
Folk softly scarfed and footed. A smile here,
a stretch, a thoughtful fall of hand and neck,

laps and waves of quiet, deeps and shallows,
the weathering of many hearts and heads,
and here I am, ambling about my mind,
a flimsy structure wrapped in bubblewrap,

waiting on the tactful pinch of words,
the satisfying 'pop' of ministry.

Pamela Coren is a member of Kendal & Sedburgh Area Meeting.



A personal journey with the conflict in Palestine/Israel

Jill Green



I am planning to show art work completed over the last twelve years around the subject of the Palestine/Israel conflict, during Oxford City Artweeks from 4 to 12 May 2013 at my home at 36 Southdale Road, Oxford OX2 7SD. The exact times of opening will be published in Oxford Artweeks catalogue, but can be obtained by emailing me at art@greenfig.org.uk nearer to the time.

This is a departure for me, as all of my friends from my BA course are now engaged in a marketing exercise for their work, and some have been badly affected by the recession. Artweeks is also usually used by people selling their work to the public. I have not felt easy with this, partly because I have felt my work is not very comfortable to live with, and partly because, having a retirement pension, I can afford the luxury of doing what *I want* to do, which is to speak in my work about our Quaker Testimonies, and *act* in their favour. I should like to offer Quakers my visual art voice as my ministry, since I feel closer to 'God' when I am doing this work than at any other time. I have been saddened over the years when hearing Friends suggest that the arts are a waste of time. I hope this is changing now and that the work of artists in our Society can be valued and respected. It would indeed be wonderful if exhibiting

space could be made available within Friends House so that Friends and, sometimes the wider public, can see that making art is no more a waste of time than writing music, plays, poetry and novels.

It all started after a visit to Jerusalem and Ramallah in 2000, my millennium treat, before I stopped flying in planes. I had pre-arranged a visit to Friends School in Ramallah, and was graciously shown around by the then headmaster of this Quaker school which educates Muslim and Christian children from the city. He told me about the grief the school was experiencing as a result of a teenager and student leader from the school who was participating in a peaceful demonstration against the Israeli occupation and carrying no weapons of any kind, who had his leg blown off by the Israeli Army during the previous week. The head enjoined me to 'Do something about this awful situation, *anything* you can think of, when you return home.'

I felt utterly powerless to do much except send money to support peace projects in the area, and while necessary, this felt too little. I considered applying to become an EAPPI volunteer, but a combination of a lack of personal fitness and family concerns led me to reject that path.

So I started drawing, painting and making. I had no idea where this journey would take me. Having just retired, I was able to go on a foundation course in art and design at Cherwell Valley College in Banbury to improve my skills, and broaden my thinking and ideas. I went on to study for a Fine Art BA at the college.

The work for this exhibition includes one hundred small paintings (20cm square) entitled 'Olive tree series' painted between October 2012 and March 2013. The olive trees speak their truth most eloquently. Some grow strongly in sunshine in the limestone landscape; some show their age in their size and twisting (up to 3000 years), some are uprooted, some blazing, having been set on fire; some are abstracted and fragile; some branches for peace offerings; and some saplings being planted for new growth. These paintings were done as a daily exercise after scanning the news headlines from *Ha'aretz* and *Al Quds*, or the *Palestine Times*, and many other articles from websites including Jews for Justice for Palestine, followed by half an hour of silence. There are also connections with conversations between Quakers and Jews in Oxford that we have been having as a result of local tensions about Quaker involvement with the EAPPI programme. The paintings thus represent a personal journey with



Olive tree series 2

the conflict, mostly from a media-informed distance.

Also on show will be my triptych entitled 'Grief is the same'; another painting entitled 'So that's why Jerusalem gets you in the throat', which looks at land issues; two pieces called 'Dove-work', which celebrate the work of the many Peace NGOs in the region; an installation entitled 'Pillows' which looks back at the twentieth-century history of the conflict; and a hung installation entitled 'Right to return, where and to what?'

Finally, I am hoping to obtain permission to have several showings of a very heart-warming film entitled *Budrus*, made during 2008 and released in December 2009, directed by Julia Bacha and presented by Just Vision Films. This film has won many awards including second prize at the Berlin International Film festival in 2010, and Amnesty's 'Matter of Act' Human



Olive tree series 43

Rights award in 2011. It follows a Palestinian leader who unites Fatah, Hamas and Israelis in an unarmed movement to save his village from destruction by the building of the Israeli security wall. Success eludes the villagers until the leader's fifteen-year-old daughter Iltezam demands that the women of the village be allowed to join in the resistance, and leads them to success when the passage of the wall is re-routed back to the green line boundary. The film is a testament to active nonviolence. Very sadly, in January 2013, a young seventeen-year-old Palestinian male, Samir Awad, was shot in the back of his head by the Israeli Defence Force near Budrus and the separation wall causing his instant death. It is indeed hard to believe in the possibility of peace in any of our lifetimes as with every move we seem to get further away from it. But giving up hope cannot



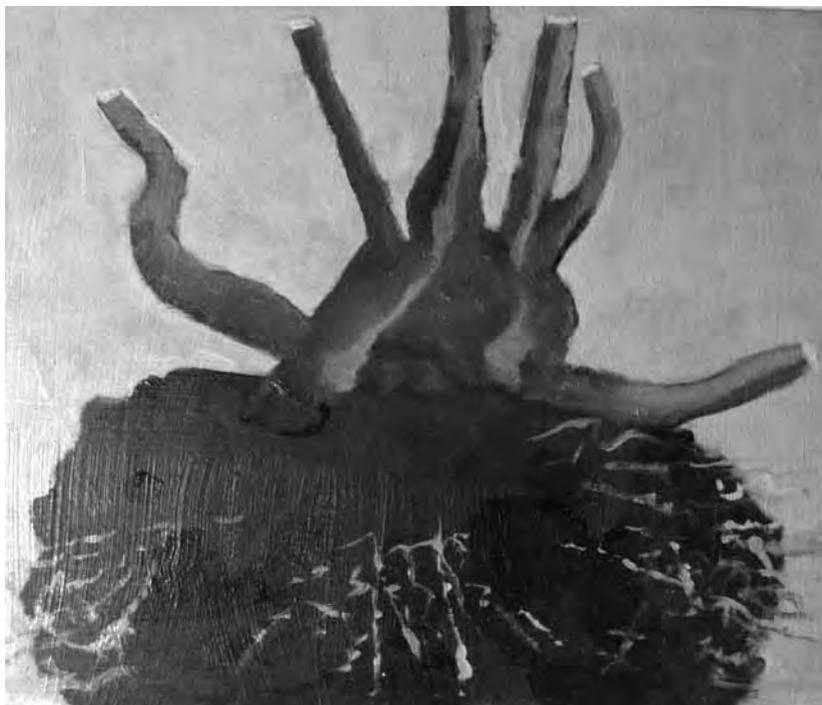
Olive tree series 6

ever be an option for people who believe in that of God in everyone. My work will not be complete until the end of occupation, a just, sustainable peace settlement has been achieved, and the demolition of the wall is accomplished.

Jill Green is a member of Oxford & Swindon Area Meeting

References:

Francis Alys 2007: 'Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic'.
Book and film of Francis Alys dripping green paint along the green line boundary.



Olive tree series 3

Martin Gilbert, 1998: *History of Israel*, Doubleday

Banksy, 2006: *Wall and Piece Century* Several Banksys have been painted on the 'security' (Israeli speak)/'apartheid' (Palestinian speak) wall

Ilan Pappé, 2006: *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, One World

Meron Benvenisti, 2002: *Sacred Landscape*

Thomas Barfield, 2006: *War Photography*, Parragon

The olive tree paintings will be for sale for £30.00 each; half of the money received from their sale will be given as a donation to the Oxford Friends of Oasis of Peace, Neve-Shalom/Wahat-al-Salam, and half to the Quaker Arts network, which has upheld me, as a Quaker, to undertake this work. Donations from people who just want to look and learn, but not to purchase olive tree paintings, will also be taken.

In a broadcast Good Friday meditation given by an ex-colleague I was surprised to hear him speaking about the way in which listening to Bach's Brandenburg Concertos had been the crucial factor in his recovery from a near fatal heart attack. He said that whenever he listened to them, on the Sony Walkman his son had given him, at whatever time of day or night, he could feel the atoms in his body rearranging themselves in response to the glorious order and freedom of Bach's music. From the moment he began to listen to them his healing had begun.

For weeks after hearing that meditation I found myself reflecting on the way in which music acts as a restorative for me. I listened to the Brandenburg Concertos again and was aware of the stimulation to my own central nervous system. But then I noted that Frank Sinatra singing 'New York, New York', or Shirley Bassey singing 'Don't cry for me Argentina' could have a similar effect. The raw energy of Tina Turner singing could, if I gave myself up to the rhythm, produce a responding surge of energy in me. I understand that students doing tests after listening to Mozart are reported to have better scores than when they do the tests without the warm-up.

The Holy Spirit can indeed restore us to health (or stimulate us to work well) through the medium of music as well as prayer or antibiotics! And why, indeed, should I be surprised that this is so? Creativity is the gift that we were given on the eighth day of creation. In naming and re-making the world we are co-workers with God, and whether we are making a garden or a meal, a painting or a piece of furniture or a computer program, we are sharing in an ongoing act of creation through which the world is constantly re-made.

Jo Farrow, 1994
Quaker faith and practice 21.38

Photo: Mark Walton.



My spiritual essence

Isa Levy

Painting is the vehicle that makes my language possible; I am inspired by moments of joy, sadness, beauty or an intangible yearning. In fact, I am curious to express the riches in my inner world where words do not sit comfortably. I wonder if this could be called my spiritual essence.

I enjoy the process of creativity and the mystery of reaching into this unknown reservoir; bringing a pool of colour into shape and form. The immediate sensuality of paint onto a blank white canvas; spreading and sculpting the paint; the smell, the colours and textures blending, seeping, and bleeding into each other with the rhythm of emotion! Then I follow



The Meeting

the painting's development like a servant follows its mistress, breathing the painting to life.

I can be inspired from within or an external subject will interest me, and that being so, my subject range is unusually varied and covers abstraction and free expression to portraiture with the restraints of that discipline – detailed shaping of form within the realm of accuracy. Accuracy is not a word that resides well with me and I do not mean it in terms of accurate perspective or dimension but more in terms of accuracy to reach the essence of the other from the essence of what lies as a mystery between the subject and myself.

Each painting is a complete world unto itself; moments captured on canvas and lost into other moments. I am interested in creating a full and whole expression within the painting; this being so, my paintings are rarely part of a series, although in the passing of time I can see how some paintings could be grouped together.

When a painting is complete, I have a new conversation with it and give no real significance to its interpretation, although I am interested in how



Into the new millennium

the viewer sees, feels or interprets the painting for themselves.

The process is the real impact of my interest in the painting. The finished painting I view in an almost detached manner, holding more of a relationship to the painting as time has passed and I have changed from the artist I was in the making of it to the person I am in the viewing of it, maybe some twenty years later. The world of colour plays and dances with singing, ringing resonances and makes no apologies to a drab world. It is a celebration of life. I hope to uplift and excite the viewer or to expose living in the question.

I hope that the sense of searching and finding in each painting gives the paintings a sense of the universal and spiritual quest in finding some momentary balance in life as all is in process of change upon change.

Isa Louise Levy is a member of North West London Area Meeting.

The road to Emmaus

You surprised us,
appearing
on the roadside
as if from nowhere,
but we were caught in sorrow
and, blinded by our darkness,
we did not see
your coming.

For a moment
I thought the
impossible,
but in the twilight
it was hard to see your face,
and I turned my hope away
as the mind's trick
born of grief.

Yet, as we walked
together
and you spoke of
prophecies fulfilled,
the women with their talk of
angels and an empty tomb
began to seem
less crazy

You shared our meal
and in that
fellowship we
saw you as you are .
At the breaking of the bread,
my soul danced and then I knew
Love's victory
had been won.

*Cherry Simpkin is a member of
South East London Area Meeting.*



A living letter

Bob Ward

A satisfying aspect of any good educational experience is that you finish up with extras you hadn't anticipated. Time spent at Woodbrooke often turns out like that as I was pleased to find again recently...

A starting point was the question: what might a letter written nearly two thousand years ago by a man in prison mean for us today? I had long been finding that Bible passages were constantly being illuminated by modern scholarship. But as I had not engaged in any formal Bible study for a while I decided to attend a course that was going to focus intently on Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Bible studies tutor Tim Peat Ashworth was joined by a historian, Kelvin Beer-Jones, to take us fully into the social circumstances in which the letter was written and even the physical means of its production, a reed scratching away laboriously on papyrus. It was helpful to have them clear up some common misconceptions about Paul, such as his alleged restrictive views on women in the Church. This was not simply revealing; by meeting Paul and his letter on their own terms one grew closer to the message as it might have a bearing upon today.

One back-story revealed by the letter intrigued me. The letter expresses thanks to the members of the Church in Philippi for their support. Paul was in prison, it is not clear where but probably Rome. Somehow hearing of his plight, the Philippians had sent one of their number, Epaphroditus, on a mission to provide him with support. Paul had been grateful for this help but unfortunately Epaphroditus while with him became desperately ill, with malaria perhaps. Following his recovery Paul decided to send

him back to Philippi bearing the letter.

So I found myself reflecting about Epaphroditus and his experiences. Given to writing poetry it seemed that it might be worth my attempting a piece about him. For a while I kept mulling over the matter. I jotted down lines, phrases, likely words but nothing took off, though the project refused to go away.

Then the unexpected happened. I found myself writing a poem about teetering on the brink of uncertainty, nervous, scared that I might be taking on more than I could cope with. Light revealed all: of course that's the state I'd been in with respect to the poem about Epaphroditus.

Progress became possible. The poem I'd been trying to reach still proved demanding to write but my own delaying tactics could be set aside. So I finished up with two poems. Each can stand on its own but I offer them together here as a modest illustration of a creative process at work and as encouragement to any others out there who might be chewing a pen. Emulate Epaphroditus: accept the task and keep going.

On the brink of a poem

Strangely drawn – it seems again –
sidling along an edge above
waters deemed to be notorious
for inexplicable eddies, wrecks . . .

How far out will safer shallows
abruptly slip to possessive depths
where as you plunge you'll gasp
at the chittering shock, thrash,
feel scared you might not cope
among shoals of slippery words,
entangling syntax, in struggles
that once begun may not be left
until, if lucky, you emerge
breathless, a lonely survivor
on an unfamiliar shore?

Epaphroditus returning to Philipi

A hard city: in Rome there's little peace
one can be sure of. A restless Emperor
feasts on vanities, thrills to casual sacrifice;
crowds clamour for bloody circuses.

Paul's voice lives on in me:

*Whatsoever things are true, are honest
– think on these things . . .*

The prison façade swaggers pride
but beneath all that bare cells
close on brutality. Paul endures, rates
risk in the name of Christ a privilege.

*Whatsoever things are just, are pure
– think on these things . . .*

I conveyed my people's blessing
to uphold him in his witness:
his guards, even, loiter at the door
held there by incredulity.

*Whatsoever things are lovely,
are of good report
– think on these things . . .*

Then fever withered me to a husk,
launched my thoughts on a sea of sweat
where I knew not where I was, yet
close to death, I sensed his urgent prayer.

*If there be any virtue, any praise
– think on these things . . .*

A fragile reed bowed under the weight
of words inked onto papyrus.
Now, in trust, I bear his letter
urging that love may overflow.

Quaker voices

*And the God of Peace
shall be with you
always with you . . .*

Have I become both messenger
and message to a raging world?

Bob Ward is a member of Norfolk & Waveney Area Meeting.

You are

You are the rain
that falls on me.
You are the wind,
blowing through my mind.
You are the star,
The one I see at night.
You are the tree,
the one I sit by.
You are the land,
that I walk on.
You are the sea,
for me to swim.
You are the days,
that keep me going.
You are the sunshine,
that keeps me warm.
You are the night,
I feel safe.
You are the moon,
glowing in my window.
You are my world,
for all to see.
You are everything to me,
You are the brother,
I dearly miss.

Edward MacDonald, HMP Norwich



Kindling a life of concern: Spirit-led Quaker action

a review by Mary Cundy

‘Across the years sincere, conscientious Friends, acting on their concerns, have had an impact on society in some highly significant ways.’ From this beginning Jack Kirk goes on to explore the role of ‘concerns’ in the lives of Friends today, and how Friends discern and test leadings.

Jack Kirk, who has served as a Quaker pastor in various Meetings in America, examines what Friends mean by the terms ‘concern’, ‘leading’ and ‘calling’.

The deeds and words of many well loved Friends including, Thomas Kelly, Elizabeth Fry, William Penn, and John Woolman illustrate the understanding he offers us. Their inspiration was found in their reading of key biblical texts, which they sought to live by, and their recognition of what they were called by God to do.

Friends’ awareness of God’s love is at the beginning of their awareness of a concern: this love is the prompt to action. Prayer increases and enriches the understanding. The way forward can be revealed through Friends’ worship.

The author weaves together the life of early Friends and the Biblical text

which they rediscovered and recognised to be speaking directly to their own lives and experiences. The message remains clear and compelling, and Jack Kirk argues that for our Meetings to reclaim the vitality of former times the scriptures must be a significant part of our spiritual journey.

He emphasises the importance of testing a concern, and clearness that the leading is God-given – this is not for an individual alone. Monthly Meeting support will strengthen the carrying forward of a concern. We are reminded that the Spirit-led community will only proceed as a way opens.

Wise words quoted from Thomas Kelly are central to advice on the focus on recognising and responding to concerns throughout life. A God-given concern requires constancy, rather than the picking up and relinquishing of topical issues. Thomas Kelly commended this as the way to a simplicity in life and lasting commitment.

The essay ends with a call to wholeness from the fragmented splinter groups, which developed in America from 1827 on. Jack Kirk feels the way will be through faithful obedience to Spirit-led concerns. He notes that whenever Quakers have been vital, leadership has come from young adults. He finds hope in the fact that following the 2005 gathering held in Lancaster by young Friends, attenders from several strands of Quakerism have remained in touch. Coming together, at present they are identifying themselves as convergent Friends.

Finally, there are discussion questions that meetings or individual Friends may find useful when sharing thoughts.

Familiar quotations and well-known episodes from the life of early Friends make this a reaffirming pamphlet to read. The Christian roots of Quakerism are central to the essay and the language traditional, which not all Friends may be comfortable with.

Mary Cundy is a member of Norfolk & Waveney Area Meeting

Kindling a Life of Concern: Spirit-led Quaker Action by Jack Kirk is Pendle Hill Pamphlet 404. Price: £4.00.



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