



October
2015

Scottish Friend



A Rock Pool with Green Seaweed and Blue Insects SP

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Please send material for next Scottish Friend by the end of January to Margaret Peacock, 16 Drumlin Drive, Milngavie, G62 6LN, or nmjpeacock@yahoo.co.uk.

Scottish Friend will be posted on the GM website and can be emailed to you at the same time as it goes to the printer. If you would like an email copy instead of a paper one, please email scotfriends@gmail.com, to let Marion Sharkey know. You are strongly encouraged to do this, in view of escalating postage costs - and of course you get the photographs in colour, as an incentive!

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the writers and not necessarily the opinions of the Society of Friends in Scotland, Britain or elsewhere.

Sent to Coventry ? with Quaker Housing Trust
Barbara Potter, Milngavie Meeting

At the October Meeting of Quaker Housing Trustees we went to visit the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, which had received funding from the trust to bring some properties up to standard for refugees to use. They have a scheme where they offer supported accommodation for those who have been granted status but are not yet confident to become tenants on their own behalf. While we were there we were encouraged to find that the director of the centre is someone who was helped by it 15 years ago when he was a refugee; this gives a depth of understanding of the asylum seekers' needs.

They have paid staff and volunteers, who are trained in the specific areas to meet the needs of the client group. They work with other faiths and the cathedral, showing Britain as a place where faiths can work together, and live with each other. The bishop of Coventry is a House of Lords member and willing to speak on refugee issues.

Coventry is a city of sanctuary, a status that is fully supported by the City Council who provide the major part of funding for their service. Coventry has expressed a willingness to have Syrian refugees. Recently they went on the streets of Coventry with "Refugees welcome here" banners and had such a positive response that they are now looking at setting up a hosting scheme where refugees/asylum seekers live with volunteer hosts.

The refugee and migrant centre offers a holistic approach to its clients, and work with the skills that refugees bring like the language service. I think it was 36 languages they offered.

Quaker Housing Trust, having had a pause in grant/loan giving for about a year, has now had a generous bequest. They would welcome applications for housing projects. QHT is restricted in what it can

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fund - please see the website for full details. Funding is for charities to provide affordable housing, and the elements that would make it a home. There is a particular interest in funding projects that benefit those on the margins. The application process can be found on QHT's website at QHT. Our secretary, Paula Harvey, can offer guidance to applicants.

Quaker Housing Trust is BYM's independent charity established in 1967, that takes forward the practical concern for affordable housing. My service as Trustee started in April. We depend on donations from Quakers, and on interest-free loans either to QHT direct, or through the Quaker Social Housing Account with Triodos Bank.



MYSTICISM

Monica Jackson, Central Edinburgh Meeting

There is a bridge between time and eternity, and this bridge is the spirit of man. Neither day nor night cross that bridge, nor old age, nor death, nor sorrow. Evil and sin cannot cross that bridge because the world of the Spirit is pure. That is why, when the bridge is crossed, the eyes of the blind can see, the wounds of the wounded are healed, and the sick become whole. To one who goes over the bridge the night becomes like unto day, because in the world of the Spirit there is light which is everlasting.

To my mind, this beautiful and consoling passage could well have been written by a Quaker. Does anyone recognise it? Certainly no one will do so from any Quaker source, since it was in fact revealed and received nearly three thousand years ago by the unknown author of the Chandogya Upanishad. Nothing else is known of this person, but whatever else he or she was, he or she was manifestly a mystic.

So what is mysticism? According to Rufus Jones, it is: A type of religion primarily grounded in experience. By that he meant personal, subjective experience of the individual concerned. For Aldous Huxley, it is the Perennial Philosophy. Huxley sees mysticism as primarily concerned with the One Divine Reality. The Divine Ground, he wrote, of all existence is a spiritual absolute, ineffable in terms of discursive thought, but in certain circumstances susceptible to being directly experienced and realised by the human being. This absolute is the God-without-form of Hindu and Christian mystical phraseology.

F.C. Happold puts it like this: Mysticism is a manifestation of something which is at the root of all religion All the higher religions have their mystical expressions. . . What stands out vividly is their basic similarities of vision. There is a direct experience of the presence of the Divine, and though unable to describe it in

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words, to the mystic the experience is absolutely valid. He or she knows.

Evelyn Underhill, the early 20th century mystic, said: Mysticism is a union with Reality. Mystics, she writes, are found everywhere, in all ages. A mystic is a person who has attained union with Reality in a greater or lesser degree, or who aims at and believes in such attainment. Wisdom is the fruit of this communion with the Divine Essence.

Sri Radhakrishnan, the Indian philosopher, is more succinct. The mystic experience, he declares, is a sort of creative insight. And, as a final summary, the psychologist Stanislav Grof has this to say: The context in which they experience the sacred dimensions of reality, including their own divinity, are their bodies and nature. . . At the cradle of all the great religions were the visionary experiences of their founders, prophets, saints and even ordinary followers.

Mysticism, therefore, is to be found in all religions. Based on illumination and intuitive understanding, it can be described as a direct experience of the Divine, grounded in an instant and ultimate consciousness of a Divine Presence. It is a timeless moment of truth, which is the experiential knowledge of the Godhead. It is as old as Homo Sapiens, and is indeed perennial. More than that, it is, even in this secular age, a relatively common experience, so that mystics past and present often sum up the convictions arising from such experiences in the same words. For instance, while the Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, spoke of the God behind God, the Sufis call mystical experience al Haqq, the abyss of the Godhead behind God.

Happold describes some of these characteristics of mystical experience in terms reminiscent of those used by William James in his classic Varieties of Religious Experience.

1. The experience has the quality of **INEFFABILITY**, defying description in intellectual terms.
2. It has a **NOETIC** quality. It results in insights into depths of truth which the intellect fails to reach.
3. Though they feel timeless, the experiences tend to be **TRANSIENT**.
4. They are often accompanied by a consciousness of the **UNITY** of everything.
5. People who have had mystical experiences are usually changed by them, in the same way as those who have had near-death experiences are changed. As Carl Jung put it, they don't just believe, they know. The word for such a change is **METANOIA**.
Henceforward the chief end of their earthly existence is to discover and identify themselves with the true Self, the Atman of Hinduism, which is both individual and universal.
6. These people feel that they have received a **REVELATION**.

There seem to be three more or less separate categories of mystical experience and the mystical life, though they are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The first category is that of the experience which is unsought and therefore unexpected, that can strike suddenly, sometimes in what might be supposed to be unlikely circumstances, to overwhelm people who on the surface might be supposed to be unlikely recipients of visionary visitation and the resulting metanoia. St. Paul is a prime example of this category.

The second category is the passionately sought experience reached

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through intensive training in contemplative techniques: withdrawal from interaction with the world and dedication of the mind towards an interior object. This is a purposeful and creative activity somewhat similar to that of a poet, artist or composer of music. This state of contemplation requires a self-forgetting attention, a humble concentration. Emotion, will and thought are fused to establish communication between the seer and the seen. In contemplation, knowledge is acquired through participation rather than observation: that fusing of the knower and the known which gives rise to the sense of the coincidence of contradictories, the reconciliation of polarities, and the clarification of paradox.

These states of contemplation are much more rare than the sudden illuminations and tend to be confined to those who are termed professionals: those people who have dedicated their lives to the intentional cultivation of powers which in most people remain latent.

But their experiences share with the unexpected and unsought ones the five usually inter-related visions: the vision of one-ness, the vision of timelessness, the vision of a self other than the empirical self, the vision of love enfolding everything that exists, and the vision of paradoxical reconciliations of opposites which give rise to a momentary understanding of the meaning behind everything.

The content of both of these types of mystical experience seem to comprise three interlinking aspects, which Happold calls mysticism of knowledge and understanding; the mysticism of love and union; and the mysticism of action. These three aspects fit in very well with the Hindu three paths to salvation: the path of knowledge, JNANA; the path of love, BHAKTI; and the path of work, KARMA.

From the first two types of mysticism, the sought and the unsought, proceeds the third. The mysticism of action is a way of ordinary living inspired by the visionary insights received. A lovely example of it is Brother Lawrence's Practice of the Presence of God.

Another is de Caussade's Sacrament of the Present Moment, and a third is the teaching enshrined in the Bhagavadgita, which was given at about the same time as that of Jesus. You must perform every action sacramentally, and be free of all attachment to results. This should ring a familiar bell with Quakers.

In a way, too, this represents the concept of the Bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism: to reach the goal, unity with the Divine, and then abandon it to help your fellow-creatures on their way. It was the mystical path chosen by Jesus.

The question now arises (or it does for me) is how the unexpected unsought vision relates to the somewhat similar states associated with near-death and out-of-body experiences. Stanislav Grof calls them all holotropic states, transpersonal or extra-sensory experiences. They have many of the same attributes as those of NDEs and OBEs: of transience, a sense of peace and rightness, and, in the case of NDEs, of being drawn towards unity with a light which is seen as the ultimate Good. In the case of OBEs some people have trained themselves to induce them at will. And certainly in the case of NDEs they tend to have a profound effect on the subsequent life of the person involved which amounts to metanoia.

As an example of the way mysticism appears to be a global phenomenon, here are some quotations from mystics of all religions and from diverse periods of history. It might be salutary to make a guess at the religion of each one before checking it out, if only to bring home the fact that they are all basically saying the same thing in different words.

1. The Kingdom of Heaven is all in all, all in one, and all is ours. (Meister Eckhart, Medieval Christian).
2. One in all and all in one. If only this were realised, no more worry about not being perfect. (Third Patriarch of Zen. 7th century AD).

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3. Who knoweth himself knoweth his Lord.

(Mahommed, 570 (632 AD).

4. When you want to pray, think of your soul as part of the Divine Presence. (Baal Shem Tov, Jewish mystic, 18th century, AD).

5. The whole universe is in God and S/He dwells within our hearts, (Chandogya Upanishad, c. 800 BC, Hindu).

6. The virtue of wisdom more than anything else contains a divine element which always remains. (Plato, 429 - 347 BC, Greek).

7. Your Self is a copy made in the image of God. Seek in yourself all that you desire to know.

(Jalalud-din-Rumi, 14th century AD, Sufi).

8. You have nothing to fear. You are in God and God is in you. (Anon. 1907. Quaker woman mystic).

9. When I didn't know myself, where were you? Like the colour in the gold, you were in me.

(Mahadevika, 10th century AD, Hindu poetess).

10. The notion of soma-significance implies that soma, or the physical, and its significance, which is mental, are not separately existent, but rather they are two aspects of ONE OVERALL REALITY. (David Bohm, 1980, modern physicist).

WESTERN MYSTICS

You will notice that my choice is fairly eclectic. We begin with the great philosopher, Socrates, teacher of Plato, who lived around 400 BC. He was a true mystic, in that he used to go into trance-like states, when he was said to commune with the Gods. These experiences left him with no fear of death, so when he was sentenced to death by hemlock on the grounds of corrupting the

minds of the young, he accepted it cheerfully.

Jesus is an obvious choice, fulfilling as he did so many of the characteristics of a true mystic: e.g. conviction of unity with the Divine for all. (My father and I are one; the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.) And, inevitably, his teaching was felt by the religious and political establishment to be a threat, resulting in his execution and the persecution of his followers.

My third example is the remarkable anonymous character known as the pseudo Dionysius, who wrote in about 500 AD, declaring that all nature is God and that behind God is a further presence, an abstract absolute.

John Scotus, John the Scot, who lived in the 7th century AD, was deeply influenced by Dionysius. He said God does not punish people: people punish themselves. Everything is divine, and evil finite. Only unite with God, and illusion vanishes.

St Francis of Assisi, (1181-1226), was also at one with nature. He emphasised the importance of Joy as much as Charity and Obedience. His tragedy was to see his beloved order taken over by the traditionalist Church and routinised.

The Béguines. This was a movement started early in the 12th century, consisting of small communities of women trying to live lives both devout and independent of marriage, the nunnery and prostitution, the three careers open to women at that time. They tended to be strong-minded and literate. Many of them were poets.

They gave rise to a movement called The Brethren of the Free Spirit, which became part of the revolutionary and egalitarian counter-flow which led directly, four centuries later, to the Religious Society of Friends. Béguines were savagely persecuted by the Church, as were the succeeding movements in the counter-flow.

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"The Appeal of Quakerism to the non-mystic"

Margaret Peacock

I have a photocopy of this pamphlet written in 1916 by William Littleboy, and re-issued in Quaker Classics in 1964. It appeals to me because I believe most of us are non-mystics most of the time - anyway I am. His argument is that impulses for good come to everybody, whether recognised as from God or not. We are all different, and non-mystics who strive to discern and do always that which is right, but have no feeling of a God's love and approval, should never think themselves spiritually inferior to those who talk about their clear sensation of being led and loved by a transcendent Being.



John Wigham has helped me to turn my life around.

I take full advantage of my year's membership which I have been granted with Edinburgh Leisure. I use the facilities four to six days each week. My Pass which the John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust has granted me gives me access to the gym, pool, sauna, steam room, personal training sessions and all the classes Edinburgh Leisure offer. I have used all of these facilities. I take full advantage that much that someone asked me the other day if I was a personal trainer! The staff know me well by now, and I have made new friends. Not only does it keep my body fit, but also has a fantastic effect on my mental state of health also. It continues to brighten my life each and every day. My confidence has increased and I have started working voluntarily for the Cyrenians and I am enjoying this. I honestly can't thank all responsible enough. I can't express in words enough just how grateful I am. Thank you all so much. I am the most content I have ever been in my life thanks to you all.

'Previously homeless, still unemployed, ex-prisoner.'

Religious Society of Friends in Scotland
Residential General Meeting 14/15 November 2015
Central Edinburgh Meeting House, 7 Victoria Terrace, EH1
2JL

"If we ... have not prepared ourselves in some measure for dying, what have we been doing? To face up to the fact of death gives a fuller awareness of God-given life ..."
Jenifer Faulkner QFP 21.57

Our gathering in November will start with tea and coffee from 10.30, and then Meeting for Worship for Business from 11.00 am. The business includes reports on the recent Family Weekend, and on progress with the minute which we sent to Meeting for Sufferings on conversion of civil partnerships to marriage. There will be an update from the Parliamentary Liaison Function Group, discussion of the budget for 2016 and our policy on donations, information on church action in response to the refugee crisis and we will consider an invitation to participate in the Quaker Meeting Houses Heritage Project.

Our remaining sessions during the weekend will focus on issues of death and dying. Looking ahead, what do you see? And what do you want? It is clear both anecdotally and from the research done by bereavement agencies, that people who make some plans for the end of their life usually get most of their wishes. Anne Hosking and Patsy Wilson have been asked to help and encourage friends to consider the end of their lives, to explore questions and possibilities.

Anne and Patsy will spend some time to begin to look at what plans we can make towards the end of our lives. There will be space for questions and discussion, space for worship and support, with ideas and resources to take back to your meetings.

Patsy has worked with children and young people, facing the death of a parent or family member, in a hospice in Newcastle. Anne is a funeral adviser in South Wales AM, with a Concern for sustainability and biodiversity in our practices. Both are active in the Quaker Concern Around Dying and Death group.

Please come to General Meeting; uphold our Meeting for Business; take the opportunity of the weekend gathering to get to know Friends from across our wider Scottish community; and encourage any new Friends or attenders who may not have been to General Meeting before, to come along.

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Saturday evening: A catered vegetarian meal will be provided with plenty of time for chat and meeting up with friends. There will also be a film for us to watch if we feel the need but this will not be compulsory. It will be a film chosen from the Take One Action collection, an organisation offering inspirational films about issues of social and environmental change.

Sunday morning: Will start with tea and coffee from 9.30am. Meeting for Worship with Edinburgh Friends is at 11am, followed by tea and coffee and a simple lunch at 12.30pm. If you would prefer a small packed lunch on departure on the Sunday due to travel arrangements, please indicate this on the form.

Children and Young People: There is no specific programme planned, but if we are notified **by the closing date** that you are bringing your children we will arrange childcare.

Access: The Meeting House is about 10 minutes walk uphill from Waverley Station. Buses 23, 27, 41, 42, and 67 pass along George IV Bridge. Many buses serve Princes St and North Bridge, both under 10 minutes walk away.

There is ~~street~~ parking nearby (free on Sundays) in Johnston Terrace, Victoria Street and Grassmarket. There are larger car parks at: NCP Castle Terrace (10 minutes' walk) NCP St John's Hill (15 minutes' walk).

If coming by car you should note that the Forth Road Bridge will be closed from 8 pm on Saturday evening until 6 am on Monday morning due to road works.

Time Table

Saturday 14 th	11am - 1pm	GM in session
	1pm - 2pm	Lunch
	2pm - 4.30pm	GM in session
	4.30pm - 5.15pm	Afternoon tea
	5.15pm - 6.30pm	GM in session
	6.30pm - 8pm	Evening meal
	8pm	Optional film screening
Sunday 15 th	9.45am - 10.45am	GM in session
	11am - 12 noon	Meeting for Worship
	12 noon - 1pm	Refreshments and lunch



Booking Form:

Name:

Address:

.....

.....

Tel:

Email:

Names of any others for whom booking is being made

.....

.....

Do you require childcare? If so, please give name(s) and age(s)

.....

.....

Meals (please complete and return this, to help us with numbers, even if you do not require accommodation) Please indicate below the number of adults and/or the number of children requiring each meal:

Saturday Lunch

Saturday Dinner

Sunday Lunch (at the meeting house)

Sunday packed lunch

All meals will be vegetarian. Attempts will be made to maximise fair trade and organic ingredients.

Special dietary needs - Vegan? Allergic to dairy? nuts? gluten?

.....

Accommodation:

If anyone requires B&B please contact Rachel Fitzgerald on 0131 669 6166 or rachelfitzg@googlemail.com by Friday 31 October at the latest. Hospitality will, as far as possible, be provided by local Friends. We will try to accommodate everyone and will allocate on a first come first served basis. If we run out of bed spaces we will send you information on local B&Bs. Please note that while catering costs will be covered by General Meeting, commercial B&B costs will not.

Return completed form to: Marion Sharkey by Friday 31 October to

scotfriends@gmail.com

3 Striven Place, Broughty Ferry, Dundee DD 5 3JD

General Meeting in Glasgow 12 Sept 2015

Mary Dower, Aberdeen Meeting

We'd been warned beforehand that sadly our speaker had had to cancel at short notice so it was suggested that as we rarely had longer than 20 minutes worshipping together as a General Meeting this would be an opportunity to have a whole hour in worship. Some of us come from tiny meetings and it can be a luxury to be in a large meeting and/or a meeting where one does not have other responsibilities. Alternatively there was the chance to attend the vigil being held in George Square to draw attention to the plight of Syrian refugees. However at least one Friend who had come especially for the meeting struggled to keep awake. I'm afraid those of us who have come a distance, starting out early, are prone to nod off after lunch so perhaps if there is a next time we reverse business and worship? However we do usually subject our speaker to the sight of gently dozing Friends ...I write as a guilty party.

During lunch I overheard a Friend say something along the lines of "I have to give the report to three different bodies and I find I need to present it with consideration of the needs of each audience." This explained to me why the morning had been so thoroughly enjoyable as all our reporters had obviously prepared carefully and their reports were presented in a very engaging manner.

We began with Sam and Sarah from Summer Shindig. This is the gathering for those in Northern England or Scotland who have a Quaker connection and are between 11 and 16 years. This year it was held at Ackworth School to the great joy of participants as they made very good use of the swimming pool. Time is divided between discussions, activities and free time. Sam had valued the LBTG discussion as s/he had recently come out as bi-sexual. In our questions and comments afterwards a Friend possibly in her 50's recalled the loneliness of coming out aged 18 and rejoiced that Sam

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and other YF's report much greater support now. I have to learn to say LBTGQ plus.

Another of the talks was on the coming Revision of QF&P. Once again younger friends are ahead of many of us! I trust you've heard of the programme to involve us all in studying various chapters of QF&P over the next eighteen months with articles in the Friend and on line.

This report led to memories of putting nervous 11 year olds on to the train for their first summer school as it was then called and seeing them return exhausted but radiant, and how ever since they have valued friendships made then. Some, having experienced powerfully gathered meetings at Shindig (formerly known as summer School), express disappointment with their home meeting. Friends we have much to live up to!

The next report was by the Parliamentary Function Group who employ Marie Campbell Jack. While not a Quaker she understands well where we are coming from. She is working closely with Forces Watch on militarisation in schools. The Youth wings of all Political parties in Scotland have been contacted to ascertain their views on this topic. Marie and Forces Watch have only heard back from two groups - the Greens who were supportive of our stance, and the SNP.

In England primary schools have been visited by forces personnel in uniform to help provide adventurous activities for free. This is not just a parent who happens to be a soldier but a uniformed individual. So far in Scotland only Secondary schools have been making use of military visitors. However we know what a popular recruiting ground young Scots are. George Osborne is campaigning to have cadet forces in state schools. A contribution afterwards by a Friend resident on an island reminded us of the lack of employment and consequent poverty island dwellers are subject to - hence the attraction of a career with the armed forces. It was suggested

that one solution is land reform and we were reminded of the work of Alistair McIntosh of Glasgow meeting in Our Land Campaign. See <http://www.ourland.scot/>

Marie plans in conjunction with the Edinburgh Peace and Justice Centre to send a white poppy to each Scottish MP and all MSPs towards the end of October. She has drafted a leaflet to go with the poppies.

The letters which we agreed at last General Meeting to send to newly-elected Scottish MPs seeking their views on Trident renewal and to MSPs urging that they take steps to ensure their pension fund is invested ethically, had not yet been sent owing to difficulties resolving the wording. The Clerk was asked to follow up the matter.

We heard too of a new document to help Quakers to work with Parliamentary candidates in the next Scottish elections. We expressed reservations about this being called a Quaker manifesto.

Marie plans to be in Brussels for the December meeting of QCEA on Quakers' role in building the new Europe. Marie works part time and is the mother of a lively 7 year old whom many of us have met at weekend meetings. We really chose a bundle of energy when we employed her.

We had responded to a Scottish Government consultation on proposals to permit the recognition of civil partnerships which were registered outwith Scotland as marriages under Scottish law. We asked that same sex marriages can be backdated to the original

date of the civil partnership in the same way as applies to the conversion of civil partnerships registered in Scotland. We are happy this has been agreed but are concerned that conversion to marriage within Scotland may not be recognised as marriages in

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England & Wales as the UK government wishes to leave this to case law. There are further complications so I commend to you the very

clear minutes on this matter. We find English law discriminatory so we agreed to forward the matter to Meeting for Sufferings, urging them to make representations to the UK Government.

We heard the report on September Meeting for Sufferings - a good, deep and focused day. This covered the public statement issued by Sufferings on the responsibilities of the UK government in the refugee crisis, and also the Vibrancy in Meetings project. This is funded by legacy income and will be piloted for three years in specific meetings. We heard too of the proposed memorial to innocent victims of war at the National Arboretum; (see The Friend of 22 Sept) and of the replacement of the current Long Term Framework, initially by a document entitled Our Faith in the Future.

A Friend reported on representing us at both the Episcopal Church Synod, which she made interesting, and also the Scottish Committee of the World Day of Prayer. This is a worldwide day of prayer on the first Friday in March and is organised by women. In Scotland we are now happy to accept the participation by men in the actual service, but in many countries it is still rare for women to have lead roles in a church service. I have represented Quakers on the Aberdeen committee so I was particularly happy to hear this report and to see the leaflet our rep had produced to inform Friends. She said with understandable pride that she had learnt to use publisher to do this.

A good day - what a pity only approximately 30 of us came. The next GM is residential in Edinburgh the weekend of 13 15 Nov. when the topic will be end of life matters. I do hope many of us are able to be there.

Approaching the Tao, East meets West, Taoism and Quakerism
Alastair Simmons, Inverness Meeting

Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre Course, Birmingham, July 2015.

"The journey of a 1,000 miles starts with a single step"

Tao Te Ching, Chapter 64

Personal Motivation

I have had a long standing interest in Taoism since meeting an Elder of Orkney Meeting well into her 90s after North of Scotland Area Meeting on the Orkney Isles, I couldn't help but notice she had numerous books on Taoism in amongst her many books on Quakerism. Sitting listening to her simple, kind and wise words in her tiny cottage, overlooking the old attractive and busy fishing village of Stromness. So this inspired me to look into this Eastern faith I knew very little about. I was also to learn later the importance of the sage /teacher and pupil relationship in Taoism.

Course Content

The course was aimed as an introduction to Taoism, setting it in its historical, cultural and linguistic context and also looking at some of the key concepts and ideas.

Taoism or Daoism simply translates as "the Way" or followers of the Way, or could mean path or spiritual journey. It is a very old religion or philosophy believed to have originated from Shamanic and Pagan traditions in what is now present day China, over 2000 years ago.

The Tao de Ching, the most familiar work on Taoism was thought to be the work of Lao Tzu but is now thought he only wrote down what was previously known or passed on orally.

It also has links to Confucianism, the parallel Chinese philosophy of the time (there was a session looking at the key concepts and differences with Confucianism).

Also it has strong links to Buddhism. When Buddhist Monks travelled north (from what is present day India into China) they

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discovered many similarities between Buddhism and Taoism, Zen Buddhism evolved as a hybrid of the 2 traditions.

Key Concepts in Taoism

Yin and Yang, the most recognisable symbol of Taoism with the intertwining black and white symbol. Everything is composed of opposites or complementariness.

Qi/Chi

The outward manifestation on the unseen Energy, life force or vitality

De/te

Virtue, power how the Dao or Tao is realised

The 5 Elements : fire, wood, earth metal and water.

Manifested in all physical things and in psychology.

Wu wei

Action in tune with the nature of what has to be done, requires no effort and nothing superfluous. This concept is often misunderstood in the West.

These are just a few of the main ideas here, there are many other ideas and concepts in Taoism. There are many strands to Taoism and it has links to: Chinese Medicine, Martial Arts, Tai Chi and an organised religious system in many parts of East Asia.

Calligraphy

The course looked at the linguistic context of Taoism, where every concept is represented by a character or a set of characters. There was also a chance to explore Chinese calligraphy with a hands-on art session.

Tao Te Ching

The Tao Te Ching has many different translations and different interpretations; there was a session on trying to translate a chapter

from the Chinese, highlighting the problems of translating Chinese

Characters

Like Advices and Queries, it is written in short advisory paragraphs on all aspects of life. The words need careful reading, interpretation and thought, and may even appear outwardly contradictory. There was a group discussion of what individual chapters meant, and discussion on their meaning to individuals in the group.

Fables and Stories

Taoism, similar to Zen Buddhism uses many stories and fables. The main author of these was Zhuang Zi. These highlight and illustrate key concepts on Taoism, often with wit, humour and humanity.

The Similarities to Quakerism.

The final session was a comparison between the 2 faiths. Here are just a few similarities:

- * Emptiness and silence
- * Pacifist position
- * Respect for nature
- * Live simply
- * Minimise rituals
- * No creeds or required beliefs
- * Emphasis on the experiential
- * Humility
- * Integrity

Woodbrooke and Bournville

I enjoyed being at Woodbrooke a lot - a great combination of simplicity and beauty, with many areas for talking, and discussing but also quiet and silent areas. I explored the gardens again, with many different areas for contemplation including: an orchard, a labyrinth, a walled fruit and veg garden, a Chinese garden and a pond.

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Further afield I explored Bournville, set up by the Quaker Cadbury family, a philanthropic model village for chocolate factory workers, with the emphasis on quality housing, and facilities such as schools,

adult education and parks. I was lucky enough to attend Meeting for Worship in the original Meeting House. I also looked around Birmingham, a vibrant multi-cultural city centre and lively outdoor market.

Conclusion

Overall a very worthwhile experience. Only drawback was the very long journey to and from Inverness, had to break my journey both times, staying with family and friends. I would certainly recommend Woodbrooke to other Friends.

Finally, during my stay, someone gave Ministry on gratitude, so I would like to extend my gratitude and thanks to the trustees of the John Wigham Trust, for funding me to go to Woodbrooke, and deepen my knowledge of a major world religion and deepen my own spiritual journey both in Quakerism and Taoism. Once you understand basic Taoist ideas you look at life in a new different way, for example "knowing others is intelligence. Knowing yourself is true wisdom " Tao Te Ching Chapter 33. The wisdom it proclaims seems timeless.

Some reading

I personally found these most accessible on Taoism:

* The Tao of Pooh, by Ben Hoff (2003)

(Some of the basic concepts of Taoism seen through the life of Pooh Bear!)

* Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu, an illustrated journey by Stephen Mitchell (1999)

(A modern translation but also worth buying a more academic translation to compare)

Holding lighting in the light...

Anna Levin, Polmont Meeting

"...Our responsibilities to God and our neighbour may involve us in taking unpopular stands. Do not let the desire to be sociable, or the fear of seeming peculiar, determine your decisions."

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As a Quaker all my adult life (and a lefty-greeny, badge-wearing school girl before that) I'm well used to swimming against the tide. Quakerism has long been my harbour. But in the past years I've felt led to take a stand, which can be unpopular among Quakers. That's a much tougher call. Here's my story...

In 2005 the European Union banned incandescent light bulbs, effectively enforcing a move to new forms of 'low energy' lighting. At the time this seemed a Good Thing, indeed a Green triumph: for once the weight of international legislation was being wielded for the most urgent issue of our time: climate change. The figures showed phenomenal savings in emissions as Europe – and then the world – converted to new forms of lighting, including LED and new fluorescents (CFL or strip lighting).

Over the past years this change has been implemented across civic life: schools and universities, community and sports centres, health centres and hospitals, churches and places of worship, shops, businesses and private homes. It was as much a moral duty as a legal requirement to change our light bulbs.

But then doubts started to emerge and questions lingered unanswered – questions about politics, democracy, the environment and human health. Firstly, people reported suffering ill health when exposed to this lighting, with symptoms including skin burns, debilitating headaches, eye pain, nausea and coordination problems. Charities representing people suffering from light-sensitive skin

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conditions were the first to alert the EU to their concerns: that the widespread use of new light would exclude people from participation in normal life, even leaving them unable to light their own homes.

This strange story collided with my life in Woodbrooke in 2013. Every time they switched on the CFL lighting I felt as if my head was swelling and splitting, with intense burning followed by long-lasting nausea and agitation, like the shaking inside after an electric shock. I hoped it was some weird migrainey phase that would pass, but it didn't.

It hit me hard. I'm perfectly well if I stay away from CFLs and new strip lighting, but that means staying away from my children's school, most churches and Meeting Houses, libraries, swimming pools... much of life as I knew it. Even harder was trying to explain what was going on when I didn't understand it myself. Did anyone?

I began to ask questions, which only led me deeper into a labyrinth of further questions. What is going on with human health? Doctors at Dundee University Hospital, studying problems with new lighting, told me they are getting enquiries from all over the world.

Then I found big questions within the environment movement, far more in Germany, Austria and Scandinavia than in the UK. How Green is new lighting really? Does the embodied energy of complex ingredients and manufacture balance the energy savings during use? And what about the disposal of CFL bulbs and the mercury they contain? Why are they promoted in developing countries without adequate waste infrastructure, so spent and broken bulbs are out on the streets?

And political questions. Googling opposition to the light bulb ban I found myself amongst UKIP in Britain and the Tea Party movement in America, where climate change deniers ranted about a conspiracy between Greens and Big Government, interfering with the rights of

US citizens to choose their own light bulbs. Just like their own guns.

Yet other websites claim that the light bulb ban is just another facet of the insidious corporate machine that is bulldozing every aspect of society and sucking its lifeblood into their profits: that incandescent light bulbs simply weren't making enough money for multinationals. That this was never properly debated or scrutinised politically. That this is the corporate takeover of light, masquerading as environmental concern.

Is your head spinning yet? Yup, mine too. I began to blog, to chart my course through this unfamiliar territory. Then people began to share their stories with me.

"When the street lights come on I can't even step in to my own front garden without severe eye pain, vertigo and vomiting. I hope and pray this gets resolved in our lifetime. I am living the life of an isolated 85 year old," wrote a 35-year-old lady.

"I am now unable to go into many public places such as restaurants and shops, or even visit friends in their own homes. I really fear having to leave my job and being confined to my flat at night..." said a guy in Oxford.

I heard stories of people having to leave their jobs, their studies, their homes – even one lawyer having to leave the country because he could no longer practise in British courts: "I couldn't think, it felt like someone was clanking my head with a hammer". New lighting was shutting people out of their own lives. And so often people told me that the unions, the church leaders, the media, the medics, just don't want to know, because they're 'doing their bit for the environment'.

Their stories left me with a searing sense of injustice. And, at last,

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a clarity. I felt led to use my gifts, as a writer and journalist, to share these stories. We are exploring this concern at Polmont Meeting. Complex questions about physics and physiology and the mechanism of European legislation would need to be answered by others. My Concern is to ask questions, not as a bewildered sufferer, nor even as a journalist, but as a Quaker: Is this peace? Is this justice? Is this equality? Is this sustainability? What is the truth?

<https://incandescentanna.wordpress.com/>

