

ISSUE 26

faith

INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

come to me:
let's play
little sparrow orphan!

Haiku Poem - Kobayashi Issa (1762-1826)

THE PATH OF ACCEPTANCE

Health and Spirituality

'LET EVERYTHING THAT HAS
BREATH PRAISE THE LORD'

Faith and Animals

INSPIRATIONAL UNITY

WINNER:
SHAP AWARD 2011

Women of the Arab Spring

*For now the winter is passed,
the rain is over and gone.*

*The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.*

Song of Solomon 2:11-12



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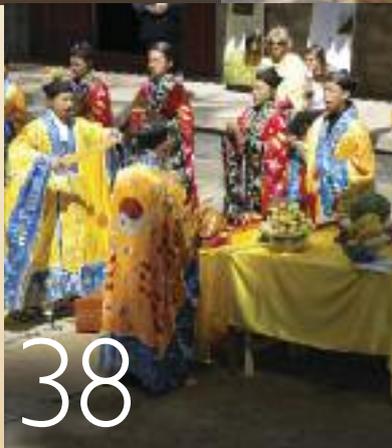
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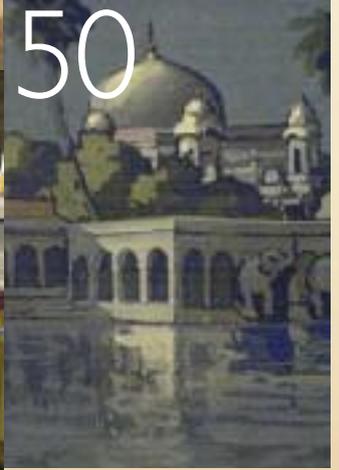
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editorial

When we chose the themes for this issue, we had little idea of the raw nerve that they would expose. With one of our main themes focusing on health and spirituality we are given, through the personal narratives of our contributors, graphic insights into the despair that can descend with illness and the sense of loneliness and isolation that can ensue: emotions so negative they can envelop one's being like a thick fog. Yet, as we read on we find that great comfort is found in religious faith and spiritual practice, thus enabling the natural course of healing - of both mind and body - to begin. Healing is a process that practitioners, writing in the same theme, tell us will not be hurried, and requires patience, stillness and above all acceptance of the reality of one's situation. With acceptance comes an inner peace - and an equilibrium of energies. It is here, in a state of balance, that many of our writers find healing takes place, whether it is within oneself; within relationships between individuals, or in our relationship with animals and the natural world. We learn from Martin Palmer of the precarious balance that sustains the universe as perceived within Taoist cosmology. The yin/yang symbol that we in the west associate with harmony is in fact a representation of the Taoist belief in the struggle between two opposing creative forces. It is the dynamic interplay between these two forces that creates the energy, and the equilibrium, to support all living things, including the cosmos itself. Hence the critical importance of balance to every area of life is thrown into focus, but so also is its fragility, and the struggle to maintain it. Clear evidence of nations out of balance, and the human desire for peace, harmony and social justice is to be found in the Arab spring, especially in the role of women. Witnessing, through the media, public demonstrations by women, many of whom would not normally place themselves at the centre of attention, has illustrated for me their courage and integrity at times of dire need. Shibban Akbar reflects on their bravery and provides an insight into how their unity, and sense of purpose, has become their strength. We should keep them in our thoughts and our prayers, and never forget that profound hope, as ever, lies in the power of the human spirit to rise, and rise, and rise again...

Heather Wells

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www.faithinitiative.co.uk

Initiative Interfaith Trust
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and Emma Winthrop.

Object:

The promotion of religious harmony by: Providing educational resources and information to promote a better awareness of the causes and consequences of inter-religious tensions and conflicts; and educating the public in the diverse nature of religious belief.

Faith Initiative Magazine

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Aim: The aim of Faith Initiative Magazine is to open windows on the beliefs and practices of world religions, in the hope that this will foster understanding and reduce religiously motivated violence.

Statement: Whilst the contents of this magazine will always be in accordance with the 'object' of Initiative Interfaith Trust there will be freedom of expression.

Invitation: We invite you to contribute articles, poems, letters, illustrations and responses so that the magazine reflects the religious communities it seeks to serve. Editorial guidance can be obtained from

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Issue 27 Themes:

- Faith and Organ Donation
- Young Faith

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SPIRAL: "This is an ancient symbol that reminds us of the womb and the protective mothering nature in all of us. It takes us from the broad sweeps of the outer life to an infinitely small centre where we cease to exist."

Cited:

Mandalas: Spiritual Circles for Harmony & Fulfilment
Laura J. Watts (2002) Pub. Hermes House,
London ISBN 184308 973 7

The spiral logo was designed by Caroline Jariwala for Initiative Interfaith Trust



EXTENDING THE CIRCLE OF COMPASSION

Should humane and compassionate people not feel a moral imperative to act to relieve the immense suffering of billions of sentient fellow creatures? Should we not feel impelled to do whatever we can to save countless animals' lives? It has been estimated that the flesh of over 50 billion animals is consumed every year. Billions of God's creatures are routinely abused, killed and experimented on in countries where peoples proclaim their adherence to religious traditions, teaching compassion and respect to all God's living creation, but how often is there evidence in practice of such compassion in our actions?

So should we not as religious believers, each adhering to our own tradition, perceive the need to examine our collective consciences to determine how far we have fallen short of the religious ideals of the love and compassion we should not only feel for all living creation but, more importantly, show in our actions?

In struggling to cultivate such an all-embracing ethic of love and care for all living beings, we may be inspired by the noble example of those who did show in their lives not only the working out but the fruits of universal compassion towards all life on Earth.

'We bow to all beings with great reverence in the thought and knowledge that God enters into them through fractioning Himself into living creatures', we read in the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*:

Billions of God's creatures are routinely abused, killed and experimented on...

an ethic truly in the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi himself.

This lesson is movingly illustrated in the life and teachings of the founder of the Jain religion, Mahavira. A contemporary of the Buddha, Mahavira was the son of a rajah. He was on his way to marry a beautiful princess, we are told, when he saw many animals, cruelly packed tight in cages. They were looking frightened and miserable.

'Why are all these animals who desire to be free and happy penned up in these cages?' Mahavira asked his charioteer.

'They are to furnish a feast for your wedding', the charioteer replied.

Mahavira, full of compassion, reflected: *'If for my sake all these living creatures are killed, how shall I obtain happiness?'*

Then and there he renounced his princely privileges, cast aside his fine clothes, gave away his property and vowed to pursue a life of universal compassion. Mahavira sought to propagate a religion which would benefit all living beings in a spirit of loving kindness.

The teachings of this founder of the Jain religion may be summed up in one sentence: 'This is the quintessence of wisdom: do not kill any creature'. This doctrine of *Ahimsa*, later adopted by Mahatma Gandhi, counsels absolute non-violence.

'All breathing, living, sentient creatures should not be slain or treated with violence, abused or tormented. This is the supreme unchangeable law.'

Likewise the Venerable Buddha showed immense and heartfelt compassion for all living beings. In one celebrated story he persuades a king to save animals about to be led to the slaughter. The wellsprings of Buddhist compassion are evident in the Buddha's own words.

'All beings tremble before violence. All fear death. All love life. See yourself in others. Then whom can you hurt? What harm can you do? Those who seek happiness by hurting those who seek happiness will never themselves find happiness. All your fellow creatures are like you. They want to be happy. Never harm them and when you leave this life you too will find happiness.'



Ajit Singh, Mark Wilson, Feargus O'Connor, Richard Boeke, Charanjit Ajit Singh, Marcus Braybrook and Pejman Khojasteh at World Council of Faiths animal celebrations.

In that much loved Buddhist scripture the Metta Sutta the Buddha compares tenderness to our animal companions to the love of a mother for her child.

'Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings: radiating kindness over the entire world, spreading upwards to the skies and downwards to the depths, outwards and unbounded, freed from hatred and ill-will.'

A modern religious thinker who has embraced this essentially religious ethic was the humanitarian and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr. Albert Schweitzer, who argued that any religion or philosophy not based on a respect for life was not a true and authentic one.

'Today it is considered an exaggeration to proclaim constant respect for every form of life as being the serious demand of a rational ethic', Schweitzer wrote. 'But the time is coming when people will be amazed that the human race existed so long before it recognised that thoughtless injury to life is incompatible with real ethics, [which] is in its unqualified form extended responsibility to everything that has life. The time must come when inhumanity protected by custom and thoughtlessness will succumb before humanity championed by thought. Until he extends the circle of his compassion to all living things man will not himself find peace.'

Should we not also be inspired by the vision of universal peace of the Prophet Isaiah?

*'Calf and lion cub feed together with a little boy to lead them.
The cow and the bear make friends.
Their young lie down together.
The lion eats straw like the ox.
The infant plays over the cobra's hole.
Into the viper's lair the young child puts his hand.
They do no hurt, no harm, on all my holy mountain.'*

(Isaiah, chapter 11, Jerusalem Bible)

This imperative to care for all sentient beings is equally evident in the Muslim scriptures, in which the Prophet is seen showing mercy and tenderness to all creatures at our mercy. A story is told of an adulteress who was forgiven because, when she passed by a dog who was dying of thirst and holding out his tongue in desperation, she got water from a well to save the life of the dog. This act of mercy to a suffering fellow creature led to her pardon.

In the Christian tradition we see such mercy and loving kindness to animals shown not only by St. Francis of Assisi but by many of the Irish Celtic saints. St. Patrick saved the lives

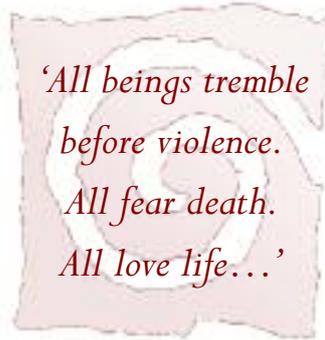
of a doe and her fawn. St. Brendan was devoted to a crow, St. Columba to a pet crane, St. Molua to wolves, St. Brigid to her lambs and it was written of St. Ciaran that his tenderness was extended to all creation.

If, as Schweitzer proclaimed, it is in such an ethic of compassion that *'all ethics must take root'* and *'can attain its full breadth if it embraces all living creatures'* must not such an imperative of empathy and loving kindness to all our fellow creatures lead us to life saving deeds?

Each of us can express that compassion in life affirming actions such as adopting a cruelty-free diet and being ever responsive to any cases of cruelty to animals we witness. One other positive way is to support the work of animal and humane medical research charities: one such charity is the Dr. Hadwen Trust for Humane Research (www.drhadwentrust.org, Registered Charity No. 261096), whose Universal Kinship Fund was launched in 2006 at the annual World Congress of Faiths interfaith celebration of animals. In supporting this charity we have the satisfaction of knowing that we are not only saving animal lives but contributing to valuable medical research into human disease and so help eradicate human and animal suffering.

One other act of compassionate witness would be effective interfaith action to cultivate, among all adherents of religion, an ethic of universal reverence for life. In 2004, at our first World Congress of Faiths interfaith celebration of animals, Professor Andrew Linzey, the world's foremost eminent theologian in this field, gave a truly inspirational address and, with the support of animal lovers of all faiths, these interfaith services continue the first Sunday in September every year. Among those attending are members of religious animal societies, among them Quaker Concern for Animals, Catholic Concern for Animals, the Anglican Society for the Welfare of Animals, the Unitarian Animal Welfare Society as well as sympathetic Jains, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs.

Inspired by these moving and inspirational encounters several of us have been exploring the possibility of creating an Interfaith Alliance for Animals to witness to the need for loving kindness to all our fellow creatures. We shall seek to bring the riches of our several traditions to the service of this interreligious fellowship, whose vital mission is universal compassion expressed in loving deeds, to heal the world and strive for the happiness and welfare for all who live and breathe.



*'All beings tremble
before violence.
All fear death.
All love life...'*

Hon. Secretary of the World Congress of Faiths
Email: ggunirev@aol.com

If you are interested in supporting this interreligious initiative for animals, the Interfaith Alliance for Animals, please contact Feargus at the above email address.

Ruh...

Don't even try to name it - it will flee way!

It's like Ariel in "The Tempest",
Real, potent yet evasive and fanciful;
It's part of our soul, elusive, somewhere. . . .
Inward and outward; we in stillness sit, searching.

Yet *that* voice comes in moments mundane -

Not in the stillness of Meeting -
When we're not trying, not seeking
It is there, the Voice transmitting,
Parenting, guiding, transforming,

Words carrying authority come -
Were they my thoughts or "from out of the air"?
My inspiration, in-breathing?

After the questioning, the Calm
In calm there is Being
Balancing, becoming -
It's "Ruh", it is Breath
It is me!

© Mary M Cook

Ruh Spirit, wind, breath in Arabic

the *Mother's Son*

It was really my mother who set me on the understanding of interfaith. She was born in the Netherlands; the family were steadfastly Jewish and they lived in a market town in the east of the country where there was a synagogue but not much else. She and her sister and brother grew up alongside the general community and so, from a very young age was made conscious of other ways of living. Most essentially her lifelong friend Nel was a strictly observant Christian to her dying day, and her values and attitudes and those of her own family had an impact on my mother.

My mother's teenage years coincided with the rise of Hitler. Although the Netherlands had been neutral during World War I, Dutch Nazis were plentiful. At least one taught in my mother's school. When the Nazis overran the country in 1940 and the Jews were forced into hiding, it was Nel's family who held on to my grandparents' papers, and the few possessions they could

gather together, and kept them secure. As it happened Nel fell in love during this period but she delayed her wedding so that my mother could be free to act as her bridesmaid in August, 1945.

Though a number of further family members were not so fortunate, my mother's nuclear family all survived their enforced incarceration. However, the years following the war were very difficult in Europe and my grandfather offered his daughters the chance to start out afresh in South Africa, where her uncle and other family members had moved years earlier.

My mother, who, like most Europeans of that time, had only an inkling of the population issues in South Africa, was shocked at the opulent way in which some white people lived whilst black people, in many a case, lived in shanties. Prior to the war my mother had trained as a nursing sister, and armed with this skill she quickly took on a job at the Johannesburg General Hospital. There she met and served all. Her natural bent to service,



coupled with her upbringing, war experience and awareness that all are, or should be, equal were instilled in her, and in my sister and myself.

The first vital decision that this elicited was that despite the possibility of our attending a Jewish day school we went to schools where we mixed with everyone. Admittedly both she and I were at schools with a high number of Jews, but both of us had as our closest school friends Christians. Indeed, quite often on a weekend my friend would have Sabbath dinner with us, and I would go with him to his church on the Sunday. I sang in the synagogue's junior choir, he sang in his church's junior choir. At school though awareness of Jewish presence meant for prayers to be without Jesus, come Christmas time carols were sung which I sang selectively, keeping respectively quiet when there were more obvious references to what Christians call the Holy Family. My school had a long tradition for South Africa, going back to the World Wars, and an annual Armistice Parade was held. In the trenches Jews had been encouraged to sing two hymns in particular: *Abide With Me* and *O God Our Help in Ages Past* as neither of these spoke directly of Christianity: I and other Jewish boys sang lustily!

By this time I was passing through the stages to Barmitzva and beyond. Aware that I seemed to be destined for the rabbinate my parents encouraged me to continue my studies and involvement at our synagogue. The Reform Jewish movement had struck root in South Africa in the 1930s. In many ways in reality more conservative than its counterparts in Britain and America, its founding Rabbi, Rabbi M.C. Weiler, added to the general services, classes and so forth of congregations two important elements:

Firstly, for the youth, an annual three week camp at the seaside, which included less well-off Jewish youngsters, and disabled or deaf youngsters. The motto for the camp was taken from Proverbs: *The rich and the poor meet together, the Lord is Maker of them all*. Secondly Weiler created a women's organisation that became the backbone of an entire organisation of aid to the black population, with the jewel in the crown being a school. Apartheid South Africa meant that it was a black children only school, but the entire Jewish community knew about it and we were encouraged to bring offerings of fruit at our harvest festivals. Apartheid also meant for some very difficult moments for the women, but the school survived, and now, in the new South Africa it shines as one of the best in the country - still with the women's organisation involved.

At university I chose to major in Biblical Studies and Hebrew

which led me almost naturally to the Leo Baeck College, London and to the courses offered there. Fairly soon after arrival I met Rabbi Lionel Blue. He was to teach a course entitled Reform Judaism. I have never forgotten the opening lesson: "For this course", said he, you will need the following books: The Tao Te Ching . The Bhagavagita, some books on Yoga, a copy of the Koran, a (then new) paper back on the Epistles ... oh, and bring a Tanach (the Jewish Bible) as well". More than that, though Lionel only taught us formally for a year, he took us to this church and that, this place of worship and that: We were thus introduced to the worlds that HE frequented and thereby learnt more of that which conjoined us, and where we chose to differ. Small wonder then that we would hold rabbinic and student conferences in monasteries on occasions, or that we were introduced to the Sisters of Sion, the Cambridge Theological students - who even came to study with us.

Lionel was not alone. The Leo Baeck College had been established as the successor to the Reform rabbinic college of Berlin which obviously closed its doors when Nazism arose. Many of its initial teachers, including Rabbi Werner Van der Zyl were themselves teachers and graduates of that college. By the time I entered Leo Baeck the London College had been running for sixteen years (Lionel Blue being one of the first two students). By now German reparation money was starting to have an effect and in that spirit Leo Baeck College was invited annually to take part in a study period in a small town on the Rhine called Bendorf. For some that was difficult and I remember the Dean of the college, Rabbi Albert Friedlander showing great sympathy for those incapable of entering Germany. Though my background was what it was - my father had escaped Germany in 1936 and my mother's history I have already noted - I felt it was important. The four or five days were intensive: Study, discussion, textual work...and services: On Friday morning we watched respectfully as the Imam who was present went through the most important of the Friday prayers; in the evening and on the Saturday we did our ritual associated with the Sabbath and on the Sunday we attended the Protestant service. With us were further clergy and students. The programme was to have many repetitions over the years and indeed led to Bible Week in the summer: A roaring success as students came to discuss aspects of a chosen text, and what it would mean to the different faiths.

We also welcomed scholars of other faiths to the Leo Baeck College. I remember one memorable occasion when Rabbi Hugo Gryn and a German pastor engaged in debate. Hugo

spoke in English and the pastor in German, with Albert Friedlander and a student of the college carrying out simultaneous translation. We all knew Hugo was fluent in German so he could have translated for himself. But after his Holocaust experience (losing his immediate family and only just surviving himself) he did not want to speak the language publicly. Yet the issue of interfaith was vital to him and that was what we heard him say.

Lionel Blue, Albert Friedlander and Hugo Gryn were the three of that generation that were to build up our involvement in, and knowledge of, interfaith. The fourth of that group was John Rayner. I know he did much in the field through his synagogue but I remember his role in this field at Leo Baeck College for something else. His subject was the teaching of Jewish Law. We would read a passage and have to translate from the Hebrew. We Jews are notorious for speaking a sort of hybrid when it comes to our faith: We may start a sentence in English but quickly slip into Yiddish or throw in a word of Hebrew. He would stop us: "Your listeners will not always be as learned as

you as regards Jewish terminology", he would say. "always attempt to make things as clear as you can".

I do not know if I have always followed his dictum. But I was soon involved in lecturing and debating, organising interfaith events and the like. In Australia I was one of a group that ran seminars for teachers on the minority faiths in the country. We held seminars where two presented the essence of their traditions whilst a third of a different faith chaired. It was held at university and was crowded. One of my earliest assignments as a Rabbi was to be guest speaker at a Christian Unity event - I believe that came via Lionel Blue who had been asked.

It was Rabbi Leo Baeck early last century who wrote a book called "The Essence of Judaism" - itself an explanation of our faith. My own journey may have started long before I ever knew of him but his effective influence and the teachers who taught in his name have given me and my contemporaries the continued confidence to communicate, discuss and try to find a way whereby all faiths can be true to themselves - but ultimately true to the sanctity we all hold dear.

*I wish to dedicate this article to
my Mother who died April 2011*

Rabbi Charles Wallach



ANCIENT TEACHINGS OF WELLBEING

I wish to explore the meaning of Spirituality in the modern world and the relationship between Spirituality, Body and Mind in the context of Health, and show that there are well established ancient systems of teachings which demonstrate how these three interdependent areas of human existence can be developed comprehensively, and successfully, in today's world. They can provide the idea, the map and methodology. As an example I will focus on the Hindu traditional system of 8 Limbs Patanjali's Yoga and its positive, and lasting, effect on mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

Traditionally religions regarded **Spirituality** as an integral part of religious experience, however now the Secular Western World of 21st Century uses the term 'spiritual' in a much broader sense. A Humanist, for example, may argue that cultivating high moral and ethical values, promoting love, compassion, harmony, justice and peace in the world marks a Spiritual Existence, and from my point of view, it would be difficult to argue against it. Generally speaking, Spirituality aims at inner growth and outer manifestation of that development, which should express itself in a well- balanced human being. Traditionally, Spirituality is acquired through teachings, and is seen as a journey or Path of Transformation.

When we talk generally about Health, we usually consider the **Body and Mind Relationship** as belonging together - the Latin expression: *Mens sana in corpore sano* 'Healthy Mind, Healthy Body' has been with us for hundreds of years. A 'Healthy Mind' thinks clearly and motivates us in a positive way: and it is the Healthy Mind that provides the discipline, commitment and motivation to maintain a 'Healthy Body'.

There are religious traditions /philosophies which combine the Physical, Mental and Spiritual aspects under one umbrella. The one close to my heart is the **YOGA** system in the Hindu Tradition. The sacred teachings of the Vedas and the Upanishads claim that the Rishis/ancient Sages/Spiritual beings transmitted the Yoga system to humans out of Compassion. Yoga rests on the principle that only the Individual Self is responsible for one's Spiritual growth through personal effort and commitment.

In the Yoga Sutras text of Patanjali, we are encouraged to aim at Peace of Mind and Longevity as our goals along the Spiritual Path, rather than Happiness. Whilst Happiness is fleeting and dependent on many things, Peace of Mind comes from within and is lasting. By cultivating Peace of Mind and Clear Thinking we gradually become self-motivated, recognising the benefits the practice brings. The system points out the many traps along the path which we should be aware of, such as Ignorance, Attachment, Egoism, Excess and Fear of Death. By transcending the obstacles on the path, the transformation becomes deeper and more meaningful to us. The veil of ignorance is being gradually lifted.

In the Eight Limbs of Yoga System the practitioner is first educated in the ethical concepts of Yamas - conduct towards others, and Niyamas - ethical attitude towards the Self. So such issues as Non-violence, Truthfulness, Non-stealing, Non-excess, Non-possessiveness, as well as of Purity, Contentment, Self-discipline, Self-study, Surrender to Higher Purposes, become second nature. By observing the Yamas and Niyamas one is already well along the way of the Spiritual Path.

The Yoga system also encourages looking after the Health of the Body. The Kriyas - Bodily Purifications, the practices of Asanas - postures - make the body strong and flexible. Pranayama practice is concerned with Breath control and Blood Energy circulation.

The Mind transformation is further enhanced by the practice of Pratyahara - control of the Perceptual Organs, which teaches us how to withdraw from the external world.

The meditative stages of Dharana - Concentration of the Mind, and Dhyana - state of Contemplation, are preparatory stages for Samadhi - the state of Inner Absorption, leading eventually to complete Freedom of Dissolution - Kaivalya.

Although Yoga aims purely at Spiritual development it uses the Body and the Mind as steps towards reaching this goal. The Yoga system is very comprehensive and requires a lifetime of commitment few of us can afford in our busy lives, but with regular practice however small, one can experience positive

physical, mental and spiritual benefits.

Through practice one can become a 'balanced person' in harmony with the Self and the World - outwardly demonstrating mental, physical and spiritual health and wellbeing.

...it is the Healthy Mind that provides the discipline, commitment and motivation to maintain a 'Healthy Body'



Spiritual Caring

What does it mean to feel spiritually healthy?

What does it mean to feel spiritually healthy? Many of the patients that I meet on a daily basis are not physically well. Some are having knee or hip replacements. Some are having parts of their anatomy removed because it is no longer functioning as it should. Some are having tumours removed which are affecting the health of the body. Some are looking forward to getting better and going home. Some are fearful of the prospect of going into a nursing home and some are being told that there is nothing more that can be physically done for them. But we all know that we are more than our physical bodies. Whatever our faith or belief, we are spiritual people. We all have a need for that sense of meaning or purpose or hope in the midst of physical trauma. And that is where Chaplains come in. We, as part of the healthcare team, seek to look after people's 'spiritual health'. How are they feeling about that leg amputation? Mastectomy? Chemotherapy and hair loss? What are the hopes and dreams that are now changed because of cancer? How does the patient now view their future? Who are the significant people in this patient's life who may help them find new meaning and purpose?

Before I became a hospital chaplain, I worked as a nurse in an Intensive Treatment Unit. I spent years looking after the health of the physical body. I made sure ventilators were working as they should, the variety of infusion pumps were administering the correct drug dosage, that mouth, eye, body care were being attended to. My focus was very much on looking after the physical health of the body. However, as a nurse I would also look after the *spiritual* health of the person. How are you coping? How are the family coping? I would seek to provide compassionate care as all healthcare workers should. It may be the cleaner by the bedside who offers spiritual care by showing genuine concern for the person, or the palliative care consultant who sits at a bedside holding a hand as he breaks bad news. We are all involved at some level with spiritual care, but chaplains are the people who have the time and training to be with patients at a deeper level. And under that umbrella of spiritual care comes *religious* care. Is religious care in hospitals a thing of the past? No it is not. When patients are faced with sickness and trauma, they often feel that their world is caving in. They begin to ask the bigger questions of life - "Why is this happening to me?"... "I think God must be punishing me."... "I must be a really bad person."... "Is this God's will for my life - cancer?"... "Is there a heaven?"... "Will I see my family again"...

My understanding of God may be different from how another understands God. However, my understanding of God is of someone who loves me unconditionally, who is accepting and forgiving, and who walks with me through the good times as well as the bad times. God is someone I can trust with my life and

the lives of those whom I love. So how does this affect my practice as a Healthcare Chaplain? It means that, whoever I meet in the hospital, I will seek to display those very qualities - unconditional love for people, accepting them whatever their background, having a spirit of grace and forgiveness, and offering them someone they can trust. It is interesting that the things I have mentioned are at the heart of the Christian faith, and indeed other faiths, and are also at the heart of the NHS. As an employee of the NHS, I am asked to provide compassionate care, confidentiality that people can trust and acceptance of people with no discrimination. The NHS HDL (2002) 76 states that "The following basic principles

...having a spirit of grace and forgiveness, and offering them someone they can trust.

should underpin all spiritual care services provided or funded by the NHS".

They should:

- be impartial, accessible and available to persons of all faith communities and none and facilitate spiritual and religious care of all kinds
- function on the basis of respect for the wide range of beliefs, lifestyles and cultural backgrounds found in the NHS and in Scotland today
- value such diversity
- be a significant NHS resource in an increasingly multicultural society
- be a unifying and encouraging presence in an NHS organisation
- never be imposed or used to proselytise
- be characterised by openness, sensitivity, integrity, compassion and the capacity to make and maintain attentive, helping, supportive and caring relationships
- affirm and secure the right of patients to be visited (or not visited) by any chaplain, religious leader or spiritual caregiver
- be carried out in consultation with other NHS staff
- acknowledge that spiritual care in the NHS is given by many members of staff and by carers and patients, as well as by staff specially appointed for that purpose

Chaplains are employed as 'spiritual care specialist', not only to provide individual support to patients, relatives and staff, but also to help other healthcare professionals recognise that they too have a part to play in caring for the 'spiritual' health of patients.



*“If anything is sacred the human body is sacred...
To render the body strong, clear and lovely is a religious duty.”*

Walt Whitman

Healing thoughts

Healing is just a breath away.

Healing does not always embrace curing.

The time to start healing practice is when you feel you are too busy for it.

Change your thoughts; change yourself - that's what healing means.

Cultivate gentleness towards yourself and others even in times of difficulties.

Healing is never loud, rough, insistent or forceful but rather soft, gentle, unobtrusive - making its way into our lives because it is invited and welcomed.

Healing needs to be considered as important, and achieved only with timeless patience.

Simplicity and relaxation allow healing to slowly seep into our lives.

Healing is a path we journey down, whatever it demands of us.

Healing asks us to embrace humility.

Be gentle with yourself, patient, calm and unafraid, allowing negative emotions to be released.

Healing can be recognized as an awakening, an accepting heart that rests in the reality of what is.

Lack of faith is the undermining factor of healing - the fear that we can never improve and recover.

Despite all that has happened in our lives we owe ourselves an obligation to embrace, with a full and open heart, the healing process of recovery wherever that may take us.

Healing is an acceptance that our lives are out of balance.

Our deepest obligation is for well-being.

Healing is a daily practice of full engagement.

Healing is a constant process of commitment that will give back to us everything we give to it - and more.

Healing is a day at a time process.

*Healing is a path we journey down,
whatever it demands of us.*

Acceptance

I quite enjoyed life. So when in March 2006 I contracted an infection, I thought I would be O.K. All I needed to do was stay in bed, rest and take my course of antibiotics. I was mistaken. I could barely walk up the stairs without getting breathless. My favourite past time, walking on a Saturday along the river in Pollok Estate, left me utterly exhausted. And this exhaustion came upon me just after walking baby steps for ten minutes. The doctors couldn't find any explanation for it. It had to be M.E. One of the many dreaded illnesses which has no effectively proven medical intervention, or clear medical explanations, leaving the diagnosis open to all sorts of negative projections such as, 'it's all in the mind'. Before I became ill with this condition, I used to imagine how horrendous to have an illness with no cure and so much stigma. **I used to think life wouldn't be worth living if I had M.E. I am glad to say I have had this illness for six years and I am very much living!**

To do this, I have had to find the seeds of determination and nurture them. These came from different sources in my life. My parents were determined people and first generation immigrants. They had a strength and resilience rooted in their belief system and in themselves. Whilst some of their struggles probably affected me negatively (as are most children affected by their parents) I feel their faith and belief in never giving up left a deep imprint on me. I searched the internet, in the early days ten minutes at a time - any longer being debilitating, for clues to the cure of this condition. Sometimes I would find simple reminders such as to drink more water, eat vegetables, pace myself, listen to relaxing CD's and relaxation tapes, to remain calm and free from anxiety. However, the latter was the hardest, how do you relax when you can't lift your head off a pillow and there is no physical or mental reason for not being able to do so. People said is it depression and my reply was well when I'm depressed I want to eat doughnuts and drink coke, not eat spinach and watermelon.

I wanted to do so much. The reality was that in the face of all these obstacles there was only one thing I could do. In fact I was in the ideal conditions to do this one thing, even though every cell in my body resisted it, and that one thing was to let go. I needed to stop trying to change things but instead to let go into things as they were. And surprisingly on days when I did manage

to do that, my symptoms lessened. Instead of it taking four hours to get out of bed, it would take 2 hours. In a contradictory manner, when I stopped fighting the condition, somehow the conditions changed. Slowly, very slowly, my body was being given a space to heal itself. Letting go, whilst struggling with debilitating symptoms which had no rhyme or reason to them, would have been impossible for me to do, if I hadn't previously been attending the Glasgow Buddhist Centre. There I had been taught to meditate and learnt some of the teachings on the way out of suffering as taught by the Buddha.



I needed to stop trying to change things but instead to let go into things as they were.

Fundamentally it was the practice of meditation which had given me a tiny glimpse into new ways of being. Whilst meditating, we are taught to notice how each breath comes and goes, to observe and not to attach to the sensations. However, often thoughts came to distract me. Through painstaking effort to be light, meditation teachers, the teachings and the influence of other meditation practitioners, I learnt that the trick was to be kind to the fact that thoughts had arisen and to allow

them to arise and pass away. You were encouraged to have this attitude toward the aching of your legs whilst sitting, to be with things as they are. At this point may I add that, despite some of the hype around meditation; it doesn't stop people from experiencing suffering, just shows how to be with suffering in a new way. Sangahrakshita, a Western Buddhist teacher has coined the phrase *Mind reactive and Mind creative* to describe this scenario. With the reactive mind I would have my usual responses to my M.E, I shouldn't be ill, this is rubbish, why has this happened to me etc. The creative mind on the other hand takes the route of deciding to note the sensation of the tension, tightness, where it is, how it is and relax into it. This honouring of the experience somehow releases the energy to do the creative and healthy thing, be it looking out the window at the trees, even watching television without tension and guilt.

The element of being taught meditation by people who are exemplifying the state of openness and compassion was also crucial. Sitting with people in what Buddhist term the 'sangha' which means those who are following the path also created a healing space. Listening to talks and chants when I could do nothing else soothed my frazzled nerves and aching, immobile

body, as did 'hanging out' with other like-minded people.

Whilst the companionship of others is important, Buddhism emphasises that to progress on the path one has to do it through their own balanced effort. If I did too much of anything - crash, I was in bed for weeks, if I did too little, that too led to a different kind of debilitation. I do not refer to Buddhism as my faith. Nevertheless, faith is involved. I needed faith to try out the practices, to have faith in myself and to allow myself to be open to the benefits of the practices. Over the last six years, since being ill, I have learnt to stop, to let go, to be a bit more with things as they are, to be a bit kinder to myself and others. I have an incredibly long way to go. Although Buddhism in some people's eyes may sound like a defeatist path because it emphasises being with things as they are, in practice it has been quite the opposite in my experience. Who would have thought being with things as they are, clears the way for things to be what they can truly be! So whilst meditation didn't stop old age, sickness or death, it did give me a new way of being with them so that I wasn't spending all my life kicking and screaming at how things should be, but able to find useful strategies toward healing and well-being. Whilst the practices of Buddhism is ultimately aimed at leading people toward enlightenment, freedom from the barb of the ego and consequently an open compassionate heart, these practices help one to walk through the inevitable ups and downs of life. After all, the Buddha said life is suffering but he also said that there was a way out of suffering. Undoubtedly, many things help me heal from my M.E, but my Buddhist practices have given me the broad backdrop in which to place myself and allow healing and life to unfold.



MINDFULNESS:

The 30 something man arrived at his appointment looking pale and unwell. He began outlining the reasons he had come to see me: I don't sleep well at night and when I do sleep I awaken with nightmares, this leaves me shattered in the morning. I have difficulty coping with my already stressful job. I'm irritable at work and home which is isolating me from my friends and family. I've tried tranquillisers and anti-depressant medication, but I'm scared I'll get hooked on them "I feel at my wits end"!

For 30 years I have worked as a psychotherapist and in that time I have met people whose reasons for coming to see me have ranged from wanting to explore their inner world for personal development, through to sensing that life is not worth living anymore. Tears are a big part of my line of work. I love my job and believe I am privileged to be invited into a person's life, to share some of their journey with them. Today's person was representative of many men and women I have met at my consulting room over the years.

I began in the field of counselling as a result of my own conversion to the power of therapy. My life had become a marshland into which I would regularly sink, occasionally finding firm ground only to sink again.

At that time I had the great good fortune to meet a monk who was also a psychotherapist - he preferred to use the term "soul friend" rather than psychotherapist. I had also recently begun the practice of meditation. Entering therapy and the practice of meditation changed my life forever.

These two disciplines are very powerful tools in my psychotherapy tool kit. Why you may ask?

When someone enters therapy it is as a whole person, which to me means mind, body and spirit. At that time the person may feel like a jumble of conflicting thoughts and emotions; may feel confused or perhaps just numb. My first task is to listen deeply to what is going on - inside and outside of them. Listening is an art, like painting or music. And like any art has to be practiced.

Meditation has taught me how to practice listening.

You see I practice meditation using the repetition of a prayer word or Mantra. This is also known as non-discursive meditation. When 'focussing' on this word it becomes important to realise if, or when, one becomes distracted, or losing focus. Then it is time to gently bring oneself back to the Mantra. This has the overall effect of quietening the inner chatter within me,

which for most of us goes on unceasingly. This practice also strengthens one's ability to focus the mind without forcing it. One of the ways I like to think of meditation is listening to God.

In the therapy session the client becomes my Mantra, as I attempt to become fully present to him or her. In this context I am also better able to recognise when I'm distracted, and most importantly, what emotions are being triggered in me, as a result of this person's presence and story.

In my opinion one of the greatest gifts we can offer another person, is to be fully present to them in deep listening. This alone can bring about profound changes in how that person feels. I

...one of the greatest gifts we can offer another person, is to be fully present to them in deep listening.

don't need to offer clever advice or words of wisdom, just listen and help that person hear what is going on in their own head and heart. Another part of this listening is, for me, paying attention to the physical messages being conveyed, for example through breathing, eyes, tone of voice etc. This again can only be achieved by being fully present. This kind of listening also needs a non-judgemental attitude. If you can imagine perhaps the way that one may observe a bird in flight, or a sunset, with no

desire to change it: just a sense of overall awareness and acceptance of what is happening.

So far I have outlined how meditation helps prepare me for this work. However it does not end there. Over the years my clients have found that it is valuable to have homework when they leave the therapy session. This has provided me with a great opportunity to share the practice of meditation and mindfulness with them.

During the session I make time to give some instruction in this practice. By asking the client to sit upright, gently close their eyes and begin to pay attention to the experience of the breath inside the nostrils...then following the breath to the belly. Paying attention to one's breath has the added benefit of affecting a part of the brain (limbic system) which helps us cope with fear and anxiety. Paying attention to breathing and body sensation also inhibits repetitive or intrusive thoughts. The Indian awareness teacher Anthony De Mello says "If you want to go out of your head then come to your senses". I ask the client to practice this breath-work at least once a day beginning with 15 minutes building to 25 minutes twice a day if possible. In future appointments I may help the client to develop the practice from the seated times of 'formal' meditation, into the practice of Mindfulness. Let me explain a bit about what this is.

befriending reality

An American Doctor named John Kabat Zinn who developed the 'Mindfulness based stress reduction programme' describes mindfulness as "being fully aware in the present moment, non-judgementally". Awareness and Mindfulness is by no means new, and has been practiced by many religions around the world for thousands of years. Christianity for instance has the practice of recollection. Buddhism has Mindfulness as a central part of its practice. Tich-Nat-Hahn, a Vietnamese Zen Master, writes extensively on the subject. It is vital in my work that I do not force my own beliefs onto a client.

However mindfulness can be a therapeutic tool even if the person practicing would not describe themselves as 'religious'. In what way is it helpful you might ask?

So many of life's worries and problems are not real: they are imagined projections into the future, or the repetitive doubts and recriminations of the past. How often I have worried about an imaginary event that never became a reality: or been upset by a past event that I can do nothing about. Mindfulness is a way *par excellence* to deal with these 'monsters' inside our head. As we practice being in the moment, in the here and now, fully aware of what 'is' and 'is not' 'what might be' or 'has been' life begins to come to us new and fresh. Each unfolding event, and how we deal with it, is completely unique. Mindfulness also frees us from a bored or jaded view of life, the 'I've seen it all before' attitude.

Most of us do not want to be reminded that we literally have moments to live: that we have no guarantee of a future: that this moment is all we have. We can at times live as though we are here forever, instead of having to trust in the 'gift' of the next moment. Yet surely it is this impermanence that gives life its meaning.

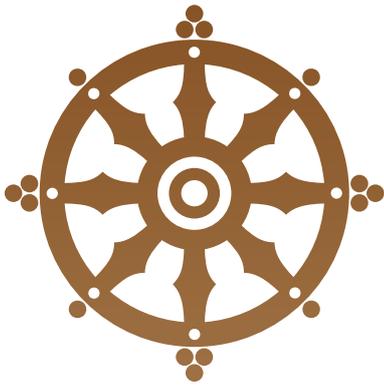
What about problems that are 'real', in the here and now? Can mindfulness help? I would answer yes! Let us look at physical pain. Experiencing pain is a terrible thing, but we can make it worse by fear and anticipation. John Kabatt Zinn runs courses in how to become 'mindful' of your pain, and in doing so to be less fearful and resistant to it. There is much work being done in this field.

One of the areas of my work is chemical addiction. At times I have helped heroin users to deal with withdrawal and craving by encouraging them to 'enter into' the feeling, and being with the reality that drug withdrawal creates. Instead of either 'giving in to it' or 'running away from it' we can learn to be with our feelings without our feelings taking over us.

This article was never intended to be a comprehensive study of Meditation and Mindfulness but I hope it has whetted your appetite to find out more about the practice and application of this discipline. As I have already said therapy and meditation changed me. I would recommend the adventure, exploration, and growth that come with them. Let me leave the final words with my Monk... friend/teacher: "Reality is always our friend".

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Perfecting attentio

That Buddhist healthcare chaplains have started to appear in the wards and departments of British hospitals is a sign that the spiritual dimension of health and wellbeing is being more and more recognised in our multicultural society. Although Buddhism is recognised as a major world religion, a recent UK census of religious belief suggests that no more than 153,000 - less than 0.3% of the whole population - describe themselves as Buddhist, of which a substantial fraction is made up of white British converts. The majority are people of Asian descent, from countries where Buddhism is prevalent if not dominant, like China, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Japan, Burma, Tibet; and British born descendants of Asian immigrants, often through several generations.

My own career as a healthcare chaplain is short and recent: I've spent less than four years in part-time chaplaincy roles in two major NHS Trusts in South-East England, and one specialist not-for-profit provider of secure mental health services to the NHS in the same region. There are very few Buddhists in such positions, and although I consider myself privileged I am very conscious of the responsibilities that go with it. Fortunately I have a long lifetime's experience of work as a nurse, which makes for familiarity with the clinical milieu, its practices, procedures; and - crucially for acceptance into its circles - an insider's insights into its esoteric conventions and etiquette, deeply-rooted in the ancient traditions of medicine and mediaeval monasticism.

In the face of widely-publicised criticisms of aspects of care, our National Health Service is rightly concerned to show that respect for the person's dignity, individuality and choice is at the heart of everything it does. This means meeting as many of the individual's legitimate expectations as possible, without losing sight of the main objectives of treating illness and relieving suffering, and restoring people to health, and getting them safely home.

In the lives of many, religious faith always has an important place; for others faith or religion can take on new significance during admission to hospital, or when sudden illness strikes. It's as well to be aware, though, in many peoples' lives religion has no place, and not a few find the idea of spirituality empty of

meaning. Secularists, atheists and humanists can find life meaningful, purposeful, satisfying, full of joy and beauty, despite and even because of the presence of suffering. People of faith and no-faith can find deep inner resources of courage, equanimity and compassion in adversity. We may personally label such resources 'spiritual', but it may be unwise to expect this perspective to be universally shared.

Chaplaincy is a specialised type of ministry, ministry being a word (one definition being 'selfless service') from Christian tradition, a tradition that has been at the heart of our British culture for centuries. Until comparatively recent times, healthcare chaplaincy was the exclusive preserve of Christian ministers, usually ordained clergy of the Church of England, although Roman Catholic priests have had a pastoral role in hospitals, serving the spiritual and sacramental needs of patients and staff of that faith. Chaplaincy is accordingly modelled on Christianity; there

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is no developed Buddhist model of chaplaincy to steer and guide us. Ordained Buddhists can't yet be properly said to exercise a 'pastoral' or 'shepherding' role, for which there are few if any scriptural prescriptions or precedents.

Healthcare chaplaincy has professional status in hospitals because the 'lead' chaplain is almost always an ordained or religiously-accredited person with specialist training or skills to match the clinical environment he or she works in, plus the capabilities needed to manage the chaplaincy team. Chaplaincy teams are comprised of an assortment of other 'ministers', some ordained, some lay, meaning 'not ordained', but fulfilling a pastoral or quasi-ministerial role within a particular tradition e.g. Society of Friends or Church of Latter Day Saints. Chaplaincy teams also include a small 'army' of chaplaincy volunteers. These volunteers are essential: they are ever-present in the wards and departments, they are the 'eyes and ears' of the chaplaincy team, and a visible presence of non-clinical support to patients, their visitors, as well as to busy staff.

Since NHS Trusts were established, and increasingly, healthcare institutions have developed unique missions and distinctive policies suited to the delivery of services for their local populations, and matched to their needs. Trusts therefore

have considerable say over how professionals act, without over-riding their professional autonomy and accountability. This means that the exercise of chaplaincy, and the behaviour of chaplaincy staff towards patients (especially) is matched - as it should be - to the expressed wishes of healthcare consumers, as evidenced by research, patient-feedback, lobby groups or consumer advocacy.

Policy on patients' religious affiliation is now standardised across the NHS, so that patients are asked when admitted if they want to express a religious affiliation, and - if they do - whether they want to have it recorded. If the answer to both questions is "Yes", the further option of notifying chaplaincy is put to them. Only if this is also agreed will chaplaincy be notified, so that contact can follow. In only a few hospitals can chaplains make 'cold calls' on unsuspecting and possibly unwilling patients; and chaplains have no right of access to patient records, or to ask if there are any patients of their tradition or denomination in the ward. Of course, patients can and sometimes do change their minds about having access to a chaplain, and chaplains will respond to that.

It can be seen from this that healthcare chaplains work in quite limiting circumstances, and that opportunities for ministry may be constrained. At the same time, hospital admission is often precipitated by a crisis, by serious even life-threatening illness; it's a sad reality too that people die in hospital, sometimes unexpectedly. Patients in hospital are cut off from most of the everyday sources of support they take for granted; have little or no control over events; have to deal with strangers; face new and uncomfortable experiences; and may have little or no idea of what is happening to them hour by hour, minute by minute. Can a chaplain help? How can a chaplain help? How in particular can a Buddhist chaplain help? Listening is important, but what a lot of people don't realise is that these days many patients in our acute hospital beds are incapable of speech, or incapable of intelligible speech. Some are unconscious or semi-conscious, and many are bewildered or grossly confused. 'Failure to cope' (medical term is 'acopia' - it's a new term coined to match contemporary circumstances) is a primary reason for admitting people to hospital: a defining characteristic is dementia or chronic confusional state. This is just one of the contextual challenges hospital chaplains face.

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our faithful acceptance of
what may be.

It is rare indeed for a Buddhist chaplain to be called upon to visit a Buddhist patient, although this does happen from time to time. Less than a half of all Buddhists in Britain* belong to sangha (established Buddhist communities based on a vihara or 'temple'), although looser associations are common, especially amongst non-Asian 'converts'. Like Christianity, Buddhism is by no means a uniform religion, it exists in many regional and very distinct forms, so that Buddhists are as likely to be as uncomfortable with unfamiliar traditions and practices as, for example, a Baptist might be with the rites of the Russian Orthodox Church. There is nothing in Buddhism that matches the sacramental role or rituals of Christian liturgy; so although one might expect a Buddhist to ask for support in meditation or in chanting, this is (in the writer's personal experience) never requested, except possibly by mourners after a death, or at a funeral ceremony.

So what remains to be done, and how? I've learned as much from the testimony of my Christian fellow-workers - at all levels of professional sophistication and none - as I have perhaps gained from Buddhism. What I have learned is this: that what serves us best in ministering to others is our nakedness of ambition, our poverty of intention, our vulnerability to what is, and our faithful acceptance of what may be. At the door to the ward, having sanitised our hands with the ever-present alcohol rub that kills 99% of all harmful micro-organisms, we divest ourselves of every clinging trace of the agenda to heal, to comfort, to console, to rescue, to reassure, to witness, or even to relate.

No agenda? Nothing to be done? It seems a simple injunction, based on a simple philosophy; but it's not an easy philosophy to understand, nor an easy injunction to carry out. It takes practice, which is what Buddhism teaches: to develop and perfect attention, and purify the mind. Like the hand-washing procedure that is drummed into each chaplaincy candidate at induction, and closely observed during supervised practice, it's a matter of internalising it, and - as in purifying the hands - cultivating attention to craving (for effectiveness, for good intent, for strength, for positive outcomes), so that it becomes a habit of mind. Under this wise and compassionate scrutiny these hindrances may then fall away, allowing us to open to the wholeness, clarity and the sensibility to which our vocation calls us, whichever path we choose to follow.

* based on data supplied to the 2001 UK census.

One Day...it will be alright

I met my husband one year after he had had a testicle removed for testicular cancer. He had endured a lot of radiotherapy. Despite all of this, he was up and about and working full time, taking every opportunity he could to enjoy his life.

We met and were married within nine months in a Catholic Church, although I was a member of the Church of England. People said we were mad to marry so soon but we both knew that we were made for each other. It was a strange inner knowing that we didn't question.

However, I soon discovered that I didn't really know the man I had married. The first 10 years of our married life were very turbulent - he had a 'Jekyll and Hyde' personality. He worked very hard all week and was as gentle as a lamb, but on his way home from work on a Friday night he would go drinking. Everyone loved him until he had had too much to drink; to say that once he had had a drink he was unpredictable is an understatement. We had so many fights - I was petrified of him in this state, but I still loved him. The next day he was always sorry and said that he couldn't remember a thing! I would hate him for a while and then come round to forgiving him.

During all of this time there was a sense that this was my destiny. This was where we both belonged and one day it would all be alright.

Then one day I came home from work and he was sitting on the edge of the couch looking like a little boy. "Something's wrong"! He showed me the top of his leg which was swollen. We called the Doctor and he was sent to the hospital for x-rays and tests. A fibrous growth which was caused by the radiation treatment had strangulated one of his kidney tubes and he had to have an operation to have a stent put in.

Over the following ten years he had one operation after another, I could see the man I loved enduring so much and all I could do was be there for him. We both had our strengths and

faith tested to the limits. He endured so much pain and suffering yet he was brave and strong. I too was brave and strong! I prayed with all my heart and soul that he would get better and that help would come to both of us in some shape or form as we struggled to cope with our situation.

Help came! A girl I didn't really know just started chatting to me at the coffee machine one day about Crystal Healing! She said that she belonged to a Healing Circle and that they helped people who were unwell. I immediately knew that this was it, this was how we were going to be helped. I asked if I could join the Circle and she took me along one evening. A lot of absent healing was sent to my husband and I had the support I needed to help him and to help myself. They gave him a beautiful crystal to hold and to keep with him for healing. I was taught so much about Mother Earth: about how there must be a God and a Goddess - a balance between male and female energies. I

was taught how those in the spirit world watched over us. My family and I felt protected. Then I knew, without question that Mother Earth and the spirit world were there with us.

Although my husband was a Catholic, he took great comfort from my unquestioning belief that we were being cared for by the spirit world, and that the crystal healing was going to work.

During the last eight months of his life, we became as one. We were allowed to find balance and peace between us. We didn't need words. Our souls spoke to each other. He found healing within himself, in his peace of mind and his soul. He is now one of those spirits who talks to me every day and guides me, and he still has his crystal.

*I would hate
him for a while
and then come
round to
forgiving him.*

***a balance between
male and female energies***



The two standard gender symbols denoting male ♂ and female ♀ are derived from astrological symbols, denoting the classical planets Mars and Venus, respectively.



DEFINING *breath*

There is no ‘road to Damascus’ moment in my spiritual journey as I was born, raised and continue to be a Muslim. My spiritual journey on the surface may seem uneventful - there being no sudden revelation or profound change of belief - yet I have been given countless opportunities to reflect upon my sense of values and spirituality.

Spirituality can be quite hard to define, which makes it difficult to then talk about the beginning of one's journey. The origin of the word is from the Latin, spiritus - breath, so could include everything that makes us who we are and sustains us. It is significant therefore that my first breath was taken in a small village in the Punjab, Pakistan, but that I was brought up from the age of two in Manchester, England - an environment that was completely different in every possible way. The contrast in cultures made it almost inevitable that interfaith and diversity would be a major part of my life, sustaining and inspiring me.

My mother has always been very religious and spent many hours reading to us from religious books: I particularly recall her relating a prayer for when we look into a mirror: “make me more beautiful on the inside than I am on the outside”. It is a prayer that has stayed with me, making me conscious of my actions in the world. I have always had an innate curiosity about my faith that found expression from an early age, and one of my earliest memories is of sitting by an old music centre and listening to a song, the chorus of which was a plea to God to show me the glories of heaven. The words and the music stirred something deep within me, feeding my fascination and hunger for connectedness to the Divine. For my ninth birthday, at my request, my father agreed to let me wear my dupatta¹, and when I started secondary school a few years later it felt natural for me to wear a scarf tied around my head.

This was possibly the beginning of my quest to define myself, my faith and to also learn about other religions. After watching a television programme showing Sufis in prayer, I felt inspired to ask my father if I could become a Sufi, to which he answered “of course”. The following week, unfortunately, I saw another programme in which all the women appeared to be in the kitchen and only the men were in prayer. Housework being seen as exclusively feminine was an issue for me even then, so I returned to my father and told him I no longer wished to be a Sufi and wanted/needed advice about what type of Muslim I should be. I decided I wanted to be the type of Muslim that did

not visit the graves of saints, or ask saints to perform miracles. My father was not sure but he thought that would make me a Wahabi which would be okay because my maternal grandfather was one. Then I discovered that in Saudi Arabia, where Wahabism is practised, women are not allowed to drive because of teachings within that faith. I decided Wahabism was not for me.

Since then my spiritual journey has shown me that: ‘no religion, Islam included, is a set menu of moral, political and social behaviour: it offers within some varying limits, an à la carte selection varying with sects, time and context, if not from individual to individual’.² This has been brought home to me throughout my life - studying, working and socialising with people from a variety of backgrounds, especially throughout school and university. I have realised that religious labels are no indication of the views and values of an individual and even now, it never fails to amaze me how people from similar backgrounds and

religious traditions can have contrasting views. After a number of challenging discussions on issues around religion and culture, I decided to undertake further postgraduate studies at the University of London. The course in Islamic Societies and Cultures opened my eyes, and my mind, to the huge variety of practices and beliefs within the Muslim world. It is through my studies that I also learnt about Sufism, and made contacts that have proved to be invaluable on my spiritual journey - none of the women I have met have been confined to the kitchen, and men always seem willing to serve!

A treasured legacy of these postgraduate studies is spending time with my father discussing what it was like for him during the Independence and Partition of India. I was horrified at some of his experiences, particularly to learn that he had had to run from a group of Muslims, his co-religionists, merely because he had shaved that day.

I chose to focus my MA dissertation on religious minorities in Pakistan. Muslim nationhood had played such a key role in its creation and definition yet Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the first leader, worked hard to ensure that all Pakistanis, of whatever religion, would be treated as equal citizens. At the time I wrote my thesis, however, economic and institutional poverty; the use of ‘Islam’ for political purposes; the lack of democratic processes; and the war in Afghanistan, had all culminated in minorities being treated as second class citizens. It was in 1970 that Pakistan became the only state to officially declare the Ahmadiyya community to be



“make me more beautiful on the inside than I am on the outside”.

1 A Dupatta is a long, multi-purpose scarf that is essential to many South Asian women's suits and matches the woman's garments. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dupatta>

2 Halliday, Fred, Islam and the myth of confrontation, p144

non-Muslims. The 1973 Constitution stated that the President must be a Muslim, and later Zia-ul-Haq enforced a programme aimed at 'Islamisation' that included blasphemy laws. These laws have been used by individuals to settle scores of a secular nature, as well as to oppress religious minorities.

My research has enabled me to reflect on the value of religious freedom, and appreciate just how precious my father's patience of my spiritual search has been. After spending a summer researching the impact of sectarianism in Pakistan, to my horror I completed my thesis on a day that would change our lives forever... 11 September 2001.

On 8 August 2004 my father passed away. Death is a fact of life which none of us can escape yet it never fails to shock those left behind. In my case several things helped with that shock: I could reflect on the circle of life and the fact that my father had never had to suffer the pain of the death of a child. The following day was my birthday - I was my father's first child - and we were able to reflect on the joy that brought him.

The funeral took place on the same day. I recall not wanting to lose sight of my father as we drove to the Muslim Cemetery and being very upset when another car came between us. We arrived at the cemetery but as a woman I was stopped before reaching the grave because of cemetery rules. I could hear and see what was happening, and can remember hearing birdsong and people playing cricket in the field next door: my father would have liked that.

I have realised that religious labels are no indication of the views and values of an individual...

My father's death made me wonder about the afterlife and I read a lot of scripture, including the Bible. I decided that the next step on my journey would be to work somewhere where I could explore further the multi-faith approach to care of the sick. In November 2004 I started working as a Spiritual and Cultural Care Coordinator with Oxleas NHS Trust. One of my first tasks in the post was to review the 'Death and Dying' Policy of the Trust. I looked up the section on

what to do in the event of a Muslim dying, and was shocked to learn that it was important that any non-Muslim in contact with the body must wear gloves: shocked, because I had never heard of this as a religious requirement and knowing that it is a strict requirement anyway under NHS regulations. The section relating to the Sikh faith stated that it was important that the dead person looked as peaceful as possible, which I felt should not be confined to that section alone. I rewrote the Trust's Policy, creating good practice guidelines throughout by combining all those laid down in specific areas. These guidelines were intended to help health care staff, but they were only guidelines and wherever possible the views of the family would be sought to ensure that all people - irrespective of faith - would be accorded the same dignity and respect.

My spiritual search has brought me into contact with St Ethelburga's Peace and Reconciliation Centre, a Buddhist retreat, training sessions with the Janki Foundation, regular retreats with the Threshold Society and interfaith walks, particularly with South London Interfaith Group. Within the Trust we developed an interfaith service with a multi-faith approach founded on the belief that as human beings we all share a common humanity, and out of that common humanity springs individual spiritual needs related to religious beliefs and practices. It is important that these individual needs be acknowledged.

I am no longer the little girl who pays attention to what I wear on my head but a woman who is spiritually uplifted by daily contact with people of many faiths. I have a sense of the magnitude of God's compassion each time I recall my father's teaching that the Mercy of God is beyond all human comprehension.



a productive cough

And when the slime swell in my lungs
drowned me, I fell in love with skin.

My man's summer pelt, tawny
as ripening rye, the kitten's belly

shaved to be spayed, showing rose pink,
the buttery udder of a long forgotten cow

were all newly dear as rumours of health.
I was in a foreign land. Appeals for help,

habitually unpronounceable for me
in any language choked out.

Frail as an apology, I spluttered free
from the con of independence

and my own skin shimmered
like a peach in a pool of wine.



Labyrinth of the Soul

It was in the early 90's that I first came across labyrinths. Coming round a headland into Three Cliffs Bay on the South Wales coast, my attention was caught by a circular shaped pattern in the river valley down below where the stone, grass and sand met. I made my way down the cliff to the entrance of what looked like a spiral type of path. It drew me in. Walking it intrigued me. I loved its beauty and feel, but I had no sense then that I had begun a journey that would lead to a discovery of the richness of the labyrinth as a resource for the human soul.

A few years later I was at a conference on health & spirituality and a labyrinth walk was offered. That walk changed my appreciation of these ancient archetypal spaces. It also changed my life. As I entered the labyrinth the question I heard was 'what is it you seek?'. I began to walk and as I did the question somehow reverberated deep in me. By the time I left the path I had received new wisdom on a decision that would change the direction my life was to go.

I realised that walking this unicursal path on the ground was like experiencing a physical metaphor for my own spiritual journey. Taking the winding but clear path to the circle's centre, spending time there for reflection and then returning along the same path, offered me a sacred and stable space for contemplation. Somehow the act of walking dispersed the energy of the body and helped quieten the monkey mind. I found myself more open to attend to what was longing to be heard. The walk became a deeply embodied prayer. Stepping into the labyrinth was a kind of homecoming with God.

Since then I have walked Labyrinths wherever I have found or created them - in Australia, New Zealand, France, the US, Canada, Africa, India as well as all over the UK. Each walk has been very different, a mirror for the soul at the time I have walked, a sacred space in which to go down to my centre and connect with that which sustains me and gives me life.



Edinburgh Labyrinth

Walking the labyrinth has become a very precious spiritual practice and a wonderful resource for my own life. However, as Chaplain to the University of Edinburgh I was also beginning to see that a labyrinth might offer a fast paced and cerebral academic community a new way to slow down and connect with the intuitional, imaginative and creative and perhaps also the holy. I led a Multi Faith support service that catered for people of potentially all faiths and none. In that context I was keen to develop resources that acknowledged a broad definition of spirituality and enhanced the well being of all staff and students. Beginning with the weekly laying of a portable canvas labyrinth the Edinburgh Labyrinth Project grew out of this interest in providing an inclusive, accessible and self-led resource. Within a year or so the Development Trust of the University graciously funded the building of the beautiful Edinburgh Labyrinth which lies at the heart of the University in eighteenth century gardens.

Over the last ten years many hundreds of staff and students have walked the indoor canvas labyrinth and the outdoor

...walking this unicursal path on the ground was like experiencing a physical metaphor for my own spiritual journey.



Columba's Bay Labyrinth, Iona

pavement labyrinth. They have been joined by local residents and overseas visitors to Edinburgh. I have had the privilege of leading labyrinth walks and workshops for staff unions, youth groups, local guides and scouts, prison inmates, Buddhist monks, feminist spirituality retreats, multi faith Chaplaincy teams, Fresher's events, student religious societies and the Festival of Spirituality and Peace, one of the Edinburgh Festival events and a significant interfaith initiative.



Festival of Spirituality & Peace Labyrinth

In 2009 I co-led a multi faith team of staff and students who had been accepted to lead two sessions at the Parliament of the Worlds Religions in Melbourne. Our University delegation included a Buddhist, three Christians, (spanning conservative, progressive and Spiritualist communities), a Hindu, a Muslim and a Shaman. We were, in our diversity, a microcosm of the Parliament gathering. We offered a documentary film, in which the labyrinth featured, and a guided labyrinth walk as one of the times of spiritual observance in the Parliament.

Some members of our team had a little experience of working with, and walking, labyrinths. For others this spiritual practice was something completely new. Yet all were committed to supporting the session and giving Parliament delegates an opportunity of metaphorically creating their own 'world of difference' in walking the circular path together. The sensitive and professional way the team managed the session was a metaphor in itself of our developing trust in each other and in what we can offer others. To allow 40-50 walkers a peaceful and unhurried labyrinth walk in the hour allotted was quite amazing. I was very moved by the team's work and the reflections of the walkers...



Spiritual Observance Labyrinth

'My first labyrinth. It was a wonderful, deeply spiritual experience!

Beautiful clarity of mind. Thank you for the opportunity.'

'Very relaxing - I started off wanting to walk very quickly and found myself naturally slowing down after a while...very uplifting.'

'This walking path is a wonderful and soul deep start on a new life path.'

'It struck me as a powerful metaphor of the mixture of 'doing your own thing' and living in community.'

I moved on from my chaplaincy ministry in the University in 2010. It was a step of trust into an unknown future with uncertain income. Slowly, my work with the labyrinth is taking shape. I have had my book 'Labyrinth - landscape of the soul' published by Wild Goose. It charts the current use and development of labyrinths in the UK and wider. A further co-edited book, 'Working with Labyrinths: Paths for Exploration', is forthcoming from Wild Goose in 2012.

As the UK's Labyrinth Master Teacher with Veriditas, a non-profit organisation in the USA specialising in the field, I am training new Labyrinth Facilitators to offer the labyrinth as a psycho-spiritual practice in their own context. Facilitators come from a variety of religious and spiritual traditions and are bringing the labyrinth into hospitals, hospices, schools, colleges and universities, public parks, spirituality and retreat centres, churches and cathedrals, addiction and street work, conferences and festivals.

I have also created Still Paths - a labyrinth resource and consultancy offering the reflective spiritual practice of labyrinth walking through Guided Walks, Workshops, Quiet Days and Retreats. This work is where my heart is leading me and where I sense God is nurturing my soul and call.

If you are interested in a labyrinth event for your group or community please contact me. I am always happy to receive invitations to lead such events. If you wish to experience walking a labyrinth for yourself then check the events on my website.

You can also visit the world wide labyrinth locator to find the closest labyrinth to where you live...then go and walk it. I wish you joy!



Still Paths

Contacts & Information

Email: diwilliams.labyrinth@gmail.com www.diwilliams.com
www.ionabooks.com www.labyrinth.ed.ac.uk
www.veriditas.org <http://labyrinthlocator.com/>

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OF

Infernal *Landscapes*

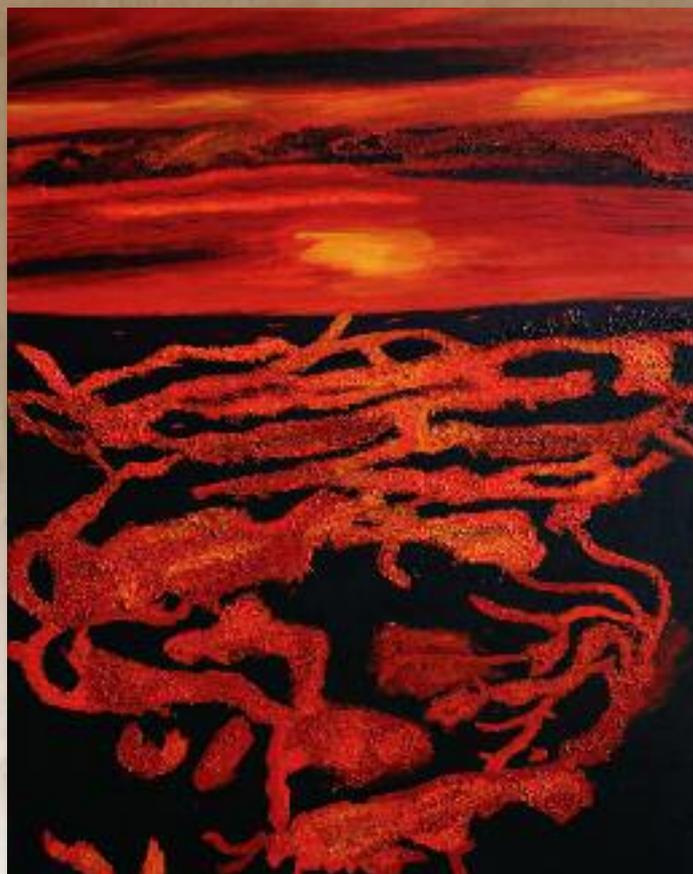
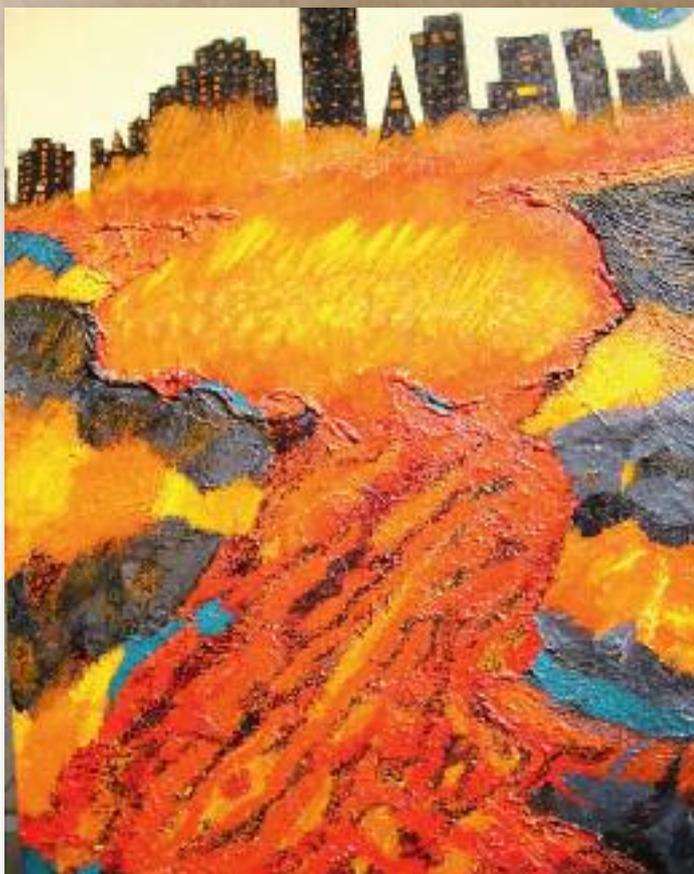
LANGUAGE

My dealings with death and serious illness started in early childhood. I have been told that when I was fourteen I died three times following a tropical illness. Each time I was laid out on the floor according to the Hindu customs, my pulse and heart started to beat again. This left me with a lasting awareness of death as my friend, something to be experienced as part of life's journey.

However recent events related to my health have taken me to the depths of despair and profound loneliness. It started with headaches that would not shift day and night - relentless headaches. I obtained some relief through my painting - some 14 red and black images: I called them 'infernal landscapes'. Then in March I found myself in hospital and was diagnosed to be suffering with a rheumatoid Arthritis condition named Temporal Arteritis with Polymyalgia Rheumatica. Arteritis attacks the eyes and if not treated immediately makes one lose one's sight. The treatment gave me auditory and visual hallucinations and I could not sleep. I went through a dark, despairing time as without my vision I felt I could not go on.

My health deteriorated and as a result of a severe allergic reaction to medication I found myself visualizing my own death. I observed this in considerable physical pain and as tears flowed down my face I experienced great loneliness...I realised how alone I was in this world. I felt that nothing belongs to me, not even my body and I was nobody, nothing!





Every moment this Universe heals me and feeds my creativity

Other drugs created damage to vital organs and with a weak immune system I contracted pneumonia. I was wheeled into the high dependency unit - my headaches were severe and my body was so exhausted with the intense pain that I was ready to leave this world. Yet, I was given the gift of life.

The damage to my liver and kidneys is now reversed and my sight has been largely restored. I see this as a minor miracle and can view the whole period of illness as an opportunity to transform my life.

I have learnt just 'to be' and live more in the moment. I have also developed a deep bond with all living things and my environment. When I look at Arnside Knott - a beautiful limestone hill - from my bedroom window I am aware of being a part of it and all the nature that surrounds it. I have learnt not to judge but be more accepting. When someone irritates me and I say to myself "she/he too is a part of me and I am a part of her/him", my negativity leaves me.

I was born in a Brahmin Hindu family that was liberal in its beliefs. I learnt about Islam, Christianity and Judaism and often attended the local Quakers to meditate with them. I have made Vipassana meditation a part of my daily life for the last 11 years, and this period of illness has made me believe even more implicitly that spiritually we are all connected and have the same core values. I visualised Krishna, Jesus, Mohammed, Jehovah and other wisdom figures all sitting by my bedside giving me the

collective healing in their infinite compassion and kindness, so I felt loved and nurtured by many faiths during the very painful times. Now I feel myself a part of everything, and everything a part of me. Every moment this Universe heals me and feeds my creativity. It is difficult to describe this feeling but somehow each and everything I do and touch seems more alive and real, and I am in no hurry, I do not pressurise myself and rush about like I used to. I have begun to enjoy just being.

The blessings from this period are still being felt as I look forward to each new day and have left many of my earlier fears behind. The pain and intense burning sensations that I felt during my ill health have found their expression in my red and black paintings.

*Lord of love
breath of my body
in the fullness of time
transformation takes place.
I have learnt to be patient
and wait for your blessings...*

cited:

Shantanu: Keeper of My Love and other Poems
by Sundar Kanta Walker 2011. Pub. Kala Sangam

LONDON 2012 OLYMPICS

Multi-Faith Chaplaincy

During the London 2012 Games the Multi Faith Chaplaincy Service will involve 193 chaplains recruited from the faith communities in the UK.

All nine world faiths - Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish, Bahai's, Jain, Buddhist and Zoroastrian - will be represented in the Centre which will be situated in the Olympic Village during both the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The chaplaincy service will assist around 17,000 athletes and officials, up to 200,000 staff and volunteers and 20,000 members of the press.

Rev. Duncan Green, head of the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Services considers that:

"Given the diversity of London and the rest of the UK, it is important for us to ensure that the Olympic and Paralympic Games are inclusive and involve all communities. All our plans for athletes, media, spectators and our workforce are developed with our Faith Reference Group so that all faiths are represented. Everyone, whatever their religion or ethnic background, should feel they can play a part in the world's greatest sporting events.

We have a unique opportunity with the London 2012 Games to break down ethnic, cultural, religious, political and economic barriers through sport and provide a wide range of long lasting benefits to strengthen the UK's communities.

The Multi-Faith Centre on the Olympic Park will have rooms for the five main faiths and there will be chaplains from those different faiths present. At other venues and the Olympic Villages outside the Olympic Park (in Weymouth and Royal Holloway), we will have chaplains on call."

As part of their recent visit to the Olympic site, Faith leaders and representatives helped launch the Faith pin badge, the fifth badge created to celebrate London 2012's six strands of diversity and engage all communities to support London 2012.

Paul Deighton, LOCOG's Chief Executive, said: "The diversity of London and the rest of the UK was one of the reasons why London was chosen to host the Games and I am thrilled that representatives of all faiths had the opportunity to tour the Olympic Park and see the progress we have made."





Photograph © Mari Buckley

THE GATE (THE BÁB)

*We stand at His Gate and await passage to a Kingdom we've only dreamed of
to a Presence worthy of peasants;
for we are all peasants
and peasants know that freedom is free from earthly chains
that spirit carries not the weight
and so we wait, at His Gate
with our fingers intertwined like our souls long to be.*

*For what is a Gate?
but a soft mercy to the fence pleading to let the neighbors come in
to let us live, and live abundantly
to let us shelter under the Bayan Tree
upon its roots and its branch
amidst its boughs and its leaves
and of its fruit, give us to eat
and of its scent, give us to breathe
and of its crystal-pure waters, give us to drink.*

*Let us in to the garden
Let the rocks that have hardened find their place in the soil
Let us in to the garden
to find the Guiding Light that awaits
is shining right beyond the Gate.**

* References to the Bayan Tree are inspired by Selections from the Writings of the Báb.

WOMEN, SPIRITUALITY, AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP: *Where Grace Meets Power*

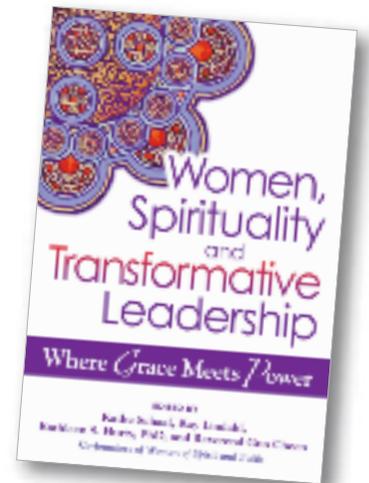
Kathe Schaaf, Kay Lindahl, Kathleen Hurty, Guo Cheen, Editors

Published by SkyLight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, VT, USA

As a woman of spirit and faith, you know something important about this moment in human history.

You know it from your rich experiences in the world, and you know it from a place of deep wisdom within.

Your unique pattern of knowing is part of a larger pattern of feminine wisdom being called forth at this time in service of this Earth and of humanity.



This powerful invitation to participate was generated out of a deep sense of knowing that this is the time, the time for women to emerge as equal partners in the world. We believe that all women are leaders in their lives, most not yet acknowledged as such. There is something about the language of these few words that inspires women to action. They have led us on an amazing journey over the past two years, including the birth of this book.

It started at The Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009. This Parliament was

buzzing with feminine energy. People everywhere were talking about Earth-based spirituality, the Sacred Feminine, feminine principles, the full inclusion of women, women's leadership and the critical global issues facing women and their children. Little pink buttons with the question "What happens when women lead?" showed up sprinkled liberally among the 6,000+ attendees and there was a full page of workshops listed under the Program Cluster "Women in Leadership." One woman observed with surprise and delight: "The Sacred Feminine is the rock star of this Parliament!"



Fall Retreat for Young Leaders and Core Circle SEATED: Rev. Guo Cheen, Kathe Schaaf, Kathleen S. Hurty, PhD STANDING: Mohini Moore, Laura Paskell-Brown, Kay Lindahl, Karen Boyett, Alisa Roadcup, Jamia Wilson. Watched over by Sarah, the Golden Retriever, who participated fully in our retreat.

It was there that four of us met and had a sense that we were supposed to do something when we got home. We started having phone conversations in early 2010 trying to discern what we were being called upon to do. We four come from diverse segments of the spiritual community. Kathleen Hurty is the daughter of a Lutheran pastor, the wife of a Lutheran pastor and a teaching fellow at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. She also worked with the National Council of Churches and the Parliament of the World's Religions. Reverend Guo Cheen is an ordained Buddhist nun in the Mahayana Chan tradition and the founder of the Compassion Network with an interest in delivering inspiration via technology and a background in Public Administration and civil rights. Kay Lindahl is a pioneer in the interfaith movement and an Episcopal Lay Leader, the founder of The Listening Center in California where she teaches the sacred art of listening and is the author of three books on listening. Kathe Schaaf is a woman of spirit not currently affiliated with any religion, a follower of the Sacred Feminine who has worked with numerous women's organizations using circle process and shared leadership models.

Many sought new models for leadership and success which valued the 'softer' qualities of collaboration, cooperation, compassion, intuition and emotional intelligence.

Our global experiences at the Parliament inspired us to learn more about women's spiritual leadership in our part of the world - North America. As we came together to explore, we discovered:

- While there are currently many initiatives focusing on women's leadership, most do not put an emphasis on the spiritual needs and issues that are unique to women and that may indeed represent some of the most significant barriers to activating authentic leadership.
- The community of spiritual women in North America is a complex pattern of overlapping networks, initiatives and impulses. Individual women are often strongly identified with a particular segment of the larger community: secular feminists, feminist theologians, spiritual activists, subtle activists, religious women, interfaith women, women of spirit not affiliated with religion, Earth-based spirituality, spiritual seekers, and others.
- Many women's organizations and networks are structured in traditional 'masculine' ways utilizing hierarchical leadership models and processes which may not invite the deepest feminine wisdom or effectively catalyze social change.
- While there are currently many diverse initiatives and networks for spiritual and faith-oriented women, there exists in this moment a powerful opportunity to build a larger field of collaboration, passion and action by building bridges of understanding to connect these diverse networks in a web of spiritual presence and active leadership toward global transformation.

These conversations led to the creation of a new organization in 2010, Women of Spirit and Faith, with a commitment to core principles which model a different way of working: shared leadership, collaborative practices, circle processes, deep listening, mindfulness and compassionate action. We exist to invite the many brilliant threads of feminine spiritual leadership into relationship and to support emerging patterns for transformation.

We began by listening deeply to the voices of many women representing diverse spiritual perspectives through a number of exploratory conversations held as teleconference calls over a period of four months in spring 2010. The calls explored a series of questions and the resulting conversations guided the emerging organization.

The next step was a retreat for twenty-five women spiritual leaders from the U.S. and Canada held in November 2010. Women leaders representing diversity of age, geography, ethnicity, spiritual orientation and communities of passion came together for three days of dialogue and inquiry focused on the potential for collaboration among the many organizations and networks represented in the room. Questions again were explored: What is it that wants to be birthed now? What are the possibilities that can flow from our shared wisdom?

The conversation expanded in April 2011 with a larger gathering: *The Alchemy of Our Spiritual Leadership: Women Redefining Power*. Our choice of the word *alchemy* in the name of this gathering was a bold acknowledgement of the mystery inherent in faith. We've discovered there are many layers of meaning of this word. The original meaning (a chemical process to turn lead into gold) has expanded and evolved over the course of history. Carl Jung used the concept of alchemy in a psychological framework related to the process of individuation. Some religions use the word to describe a process of transformation and the acquiring of wisdom. Dictionary.com offers this definition: any magical power or process of transmuting a common substance, usually of little value, into a substance of great value. There is a sense of mystery wrapped around the word, an invitation to surrender to the unknown together and be changed.

More than 150 women from across the U.S. and Canada came together in San Francisco to experience many diverse expressions of spiritual leadership. This gathering was built around a series of questions explored through circle dialogues which invited the wisdom and experience of every woman present.

As we explored our diversity at the Alchemy gathering, we discovered something powerful about our unity. Catholic and Buddhist nuns, indigenous wisdom keepers, Episcopal priests, Jewish and Muslim activists, Pagan priestesses, young feminists, Lutheran theologians, Hindu practitioners, Urantia Readers,

Christian Scientists, New Thought ministers, lesbian clergy, Sikh filmmakers, interfaith leaders and unaffiliated spiritual seekers came together to share their stories and to listen deeply to the stories of their sisters. Some of them were women of faith affiliated with a particular religion; others of them were women of spirit who live their spiritual lives in the spaces between organized religions, often blending spiritual traditions. Through a series of authentic conversations, they began to glimpse their common ground: many shared a sense of urgency about being of service to the planet at this time of uncertainty and transition. Many contributed creative ideas of ways to encourage the flourishing of the human family. Many described feeling marginalized and undervalued as leaders in their workplace, churches, organizations, and communities. Many sought new models for leadership and success which valued the 'softer' qualities of collaboration, cooperation, compassion, intuition and emotional intelligence. Alchemy offered a lived experience of the Sacred Feminine as the grace and power of our collective feminine wisdom and passion transcended the boundaries of culture, ethnicity, religion or age.

We had sent the invitation to Alchemy to the editor of Kay's books. She was unable to attend, having already committed to another event that weekend, but she wondered if we had thought about writing a book based on the conference topics. This was a new idea for us, but after a conference call with her we wrote up a book proposal and signed a contract to edit this anthology of 26 women's voices. We were on a short timeline - our first draft was due in six months. We used the same questions we explored in the Alchemy conference:

How do I Express Being an Empowered Woman of Spirit and Faith?

How do my Spiritual Values Inform me About Living with the Challenges and Blessings of Diversity?

How do we stand for the Greatness of Each Other?

How do we Catalyze our Collective Transformational Power as Women of Spirit and Faith?

We invited each woman to respond to the question that most spoke to her. Working with this amazing diverse group of women was a gift. We found that each one had their own style

and way of approaching the questions, and yet there was a profound sense of commonality to their journeys. In claiming their own voices, they embody the variety of paths on the spiritual journey.

Following each collection of essays is a section called Living Our Leadership with tools and techniques for women to use in their own lives. It is our intention that the book models a sacred space where the spiritual and faith-informed voices of diverse women can be heard, and where the power of women's spiritual leadership can be explored, nurtured and celebrated. We are encouraging women to create their own circles wherever they are and to connect with us via our website: www.womenofspiritandfaith.org

These circles are a safe space to explore what it means to be a woman of spirit and faith.

We have learned that it is in the quality of our questions that we are led to new ways of responding.

Questions such as:

- What have we learned about new models of leadership grounded in feminine principles, and lived in the world with grace and power?
- What is being asked of you as an individual woman looking for ways to make a meaningful contribution at this time in your life?
- How do women begin to collectively step into the opportunities before us now in the most powerful way, and with the most impact?
- How do we find our way forward, together, for the greater good?

We do not need to have all the answers to these questions. All we need is curiosity, some safe spaces to have deeper conversations with others, and the capacity to listen with our hearts open. Answers take root in such rich soil, and we find ourselves launched into exciting new frontiers of leadership led by spirit and fueled by our own passions.

"True wisdom to do what we have to do is already here. The remembrance of this is what is emerging. We are midwifing one another." Participant at a Women of Spirit and Faith gathering.

This is a potent moment in time for women, a portal which has been opened by the turbulence of our world. John Shea writes in *Stories of God*, "When order crumbles, mystery rises."¹ We welcome you on a journey into the mystery and potential at the intersection of women, spirituality and transformative leadership.



¹ *Stories of God*, John Shea, Mercier Press, Dublin, Ireland, 1989.

The Sacred Art of Listening: Forty reflections for cultivating a spiritual practice by Kay Lindahl UK edition Pub.

Wild Goose Publications 2002 with illustrations by Amy Schnapper

Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening: A guide to enrich your relationships and kindle your spiritual life

By Kay Lindahl Pub. Skylight Paths Publishing 2003.

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*If I were a doe living in the forest
 Eating grass and leaves
 With God's grace, I would find my groom
 I would ever be a sacrifice to Him
 I am the shopkeeper trading in God
 Trading Your Name is my business
 If I were a cuckoo living in the mango tree
 Contemplating and singing the Word
 God reveals through His mercy
 Immense beauty and wonderful vision
 If I were a fish living in water
 Observing all the creatures therein
 And my beloved lived on both sides of the water
 I would hug Him with stretched arms
 If I were a female snake dwelling in the ground
 Let God's Word be in my being
 My dread would vanish
 Says Nanak, she is forever married
 As light meets light*

Guru Granth Sahib, p.157

Translation by Charanjit Ajit Singh

Cited: The Wisdom of Sikhism
 compiled by Charanjit K.AjitSingh

Pub. Oneworld 2001 p.48

*"when the sun's heat became
 intense a cobra came to provide
 shade to the head of Guru Nanak,
 such was his connection with
 other beings"*

LORD of ALL



*'There is not an animal
(that lives) on the earth,
Nor a being that flies
On its wings, but (forms
Part of) communities like you.
Nothing have we omitted
From the Book, and they (all)
Shall be gathered to their Lord
In the end.'* Holy Qur'an, 6, 38ⁱ

*'And the birds gathered
(In assemblies): all with him
Did turn to God.'* Holy Qur'an 38, 19ⁱⁱⁱ

He wrote the Psalms, known as the Zaboor in Arabic: in the 150th Psalm he proclaims:

'Let everything which has breath praise the Lord'

His son, the Prophet Suleiman, possessed the gift of understanding the languages of animals. All creatures, birds and beasts, as well as the wind and the Jinn were under his command. He was able to talk to the birds in their own language. One of the most interesting stories in the Holy Qur'an is that of the Prophet Suleiman and Bilqees, the Queen of Sheba. It was the Hoopoe who discovered her in her kingdom during his long flights over other territories. Suleiman sent the Hoopoe back to Bilqees' kingdom with a letter, asking her to visit him. Having heard that she worshipped others beside God, he wanted to teach her about the One God. It was Suleiman's habit to hold meetings and assemblies with the birds, who all gathered around him to listen to him when he addressed them, telling them of the Oneness and might of Allah Almighty.

Another lovely story about the Prophet Suleiman tells us about his treatment of ants. One day Suleiman and his mighty army were approaching a valley where there was a colony of ants.

*'One of the ants said:
'O ye ants, get into
Your habitations, lest Solomon
And his hosts crush you
(Under foot) without knowing it.'* Holy Qur'an 27, 18^{iv}



We are told that Suleiman understood what the ant had said, and was amused at her speech. He made sure that his army carefully walked around the ant colony's dwellings so that they would not be harmed.

Tradition also tells us of the kindness of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him), towards animals, and many Sufi teaching stories illustrate the highest degree of compassion shown by Sufi saints towards God's creatures and all of Creation. Indeed, in my experience, the more spiritual people become, the more their understanding, compassion, consideration and love towards animals grows. In fact, respect, kindness and mercy towards them is part of faith. Many Sufi stories tell of the respect towards God's tiniest of creatures, the ant. In fact tradition has it that an ant helped to save the Prophet Ibrahim from Nimrod's fire. It kept running back and forth with minute drops of water in its mouth to quench the flames. Modern day Sufis also take great care not to tread either on an ant, a caterpillar or to kill a fly, a bee or a spider. Indeed, spiders are held in great esteem, for it was a spider who wove her web

Part of faith, in my opinion, is belief not only in original sources, like the Qur'an, hadith and history but also in legends and traditions. These have grown up over the centuries and have been repeated from one generation to another. Animals are mentioned in many surahs of the Qur'an and several chapters are even named after them - for example, The Cow; The Bee; The Ant; The Spider; The Elephant and The Chargers. The animals which serve us, like the cow, are mentioned very often, the way in which cows give us milk and meat, or the camel, horse, donkey and the elephant, who carry us far distances. Animals are especially mentioned in allegories and stories, often in order to demonstrate to mankind that nothing moves or has its being except by the authority of Allah Almighty, the One.

*'Do they not observe
The birds above them,
Spreading their wings and folding them in?
None can uphold them
Except (God) Most Gracious:
Truly it is He
That watches over all things.'* Holy Qur'an 67, 19ⁱⁱ

The Prophet David (Daoud) was given the gift of a beautiful voice and we are told that when he worshipped his Lord in the evening and in the morning, the hills and the birds joined in with him.



Photograph: Rajiv Lather www.birdforum.net

over the entrance to the cave where the Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr were hiding during the Hijrah when they fled from Mecca to Medina. When their enemies, the Quraish, came in search of them to kill them, they noticed that two doves had made their nest at the cave's entrance and that a spider had spun its web from a tree. From this the Meccans came to the conclusion that there could be no-one hiding in the cave, as no-one could have entered it without disturbing the nest and the web. Thus the Prophet's life was saved.^v

Cats were the Prophet Muhammad's favourite animals, and love for them is considered to be part of faith. He extolled people to treat them well, with gentleness and kindness, as they are members of the family 'and are of those who go around among us'. Because the Prophet Muhammad often stroked cats on their heads, they have four stripes, the marks of his fingers, on their heads. There is a well-known story about the Prophet Muhammad who, finding his cat, Muezza, lying on his *jubbah* (cloak) when the *adhan* (call to prayer) had been called and he wanted to perform his prayers, he let him continue to sleep. Instead of taking up his cloak and disturbing the cat, he carefully cut out the sleeve, putting it on minus its sleeve and concentrated on his devotions.ⁱ

Cats are great companions and are loved not only for their grace and elegance, but also for their companionship. In most Sufi *zawayah* (convents) cats are found in abundance. During Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi's last illness his cat kept a solitary vigil outside the cell where he prayed and meditated. When he died, the cat walked with all the mourners in Mevlana's funeral



...the more spiritual people become, the more their understanding, compassion, consideration and love towards animals grows.

procession and followed him to his grave. When the funeral party returned to Mevlana's house, the cat took up its post on the threshold of its master's meditation cell. It refused to eat or drink and did not survive its master for more than a week. Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi's daughter wrapped it in a winding sheet, buried it beside its master and distributed sweets to Mevlana's followers.^{vi}

We have noticed over the years that cats like to join the prayer-lines. We have observed this phenomenon not only in our house but also in the *zawiyah* in Cyprus where our Sheikh, Sheikh Nazim al Qubrusi, lives; in mosques and in private houses. Whenever they hear the *adhān* the cats arrive and quietly look on as we take our places for prayer. Our cats seem especially to like the morning and evening prayers! Our present cat sits patiently beside us, purring and doing its own *dhikr* when we pray.

In Islamic literature we have the great allegory about the Sufi quest for God, called 'The Conference of the Birds' by Farid ud-Din Attar, a 12th century mystic. In his allegorical poem he describes how all the birds gather to set out on a pilgrimage to the court of the Simurgh in search of their king. Each bird recounts its story and tells of its sufferings on

the Path to the Hoopoe, who represents the Sheikh in charge of the spiritual journey. The Hoopoe tells anecdotes along the way in order to teach each bird about its own personal difficulties along the spiritual path in search of God.

As well as traditional stories and allegories in Islamic literature, there is the beautiful 'Little Flowers of St Francis', in which we read the most charming tales. Those most familiar to us are the ones about animals. There is the story of St Francis preaching to his sisters, the birds, and a particularly delightful one about his taming of the wolf of Gubbio, Friar Wolf, as he calls him. St Francis, like the Sufis, did not put God's creatures below mankind in Creation. They all sing their praises to their Lord in their own way. The Qur'an tells us that every created thing has its own *dhikr* in praise of its Lord.

*'And to God doth obeisance
All that is in the heavens
And on earth, whether
Moving (living) creatures
Or the angels: for none
Are arrogant (before their Lord).
They all revere their Lord,
High above them, and they do
All that they are commanded.'* Holy Qur'an 16, 49-50^{vii}

i Annemarie Schimmel, *Die orientalische Katze*, P. 11.

ii The Holy Qur'an, Text, Translation and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali

iii Ibid

iv Ibid

iv Ibid

v Martin Lings, *Muhammad, His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*, P. 119

vi *Die Orientalische Katze*, Annemarie Schimmel, P. 121

vii The Holy Qur'an, Text, Translation and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.



Restoring BALANCE

Why Taoism might just be the key to stopping the trade in endangered species for Traditional Chinese Medicine.

*The Tao is the breath that never dies. It is the Mother to All Creation.
It is the root and ground of every soul - the fountain of Heaven and earth, laid open.
- Endless source, endless river River of no shape, river of no water
Drifting invisibly from place to place It never ends and it never fails.*

This is chapter 6 of the foundational text of Taoism - the Tao Te Ching written some 2500 years ago. The name Taoism (sometimes now spelt the modern way as Daoism) means followers of The Way - the Tao. The Tao is the natural Way of the universe and it flows through everything, giving life and meaning to everything as the chapter quoted above shows.

Such a universal view of the interconnectedness between all life is what lies at the heart of the Taoism engagement in the environment. It is rather beautifully expressed in the Taoist Statement on the Environment which was published in 1995 when the China Taoist Association joined the international Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC - www.arcworld.org).

"Daoism has a unique sense of value in that it judges affluence by the number of different species. If all things in the universe grow well, then a society is a community of affluence. If not, this kingdom is on the decline. This view encourages both government and people to take good care of nature. This thought is a special contribution by Daoism to the conservation of nature."

At the heart of Taoism is the belief that the universe is composed of two opposing forces, yin and yang. Yin is cold, dark, female, autumn and winter and earth, while yang is hot, light, male, spring and summer and heaven. These two forces are locked in a perpetual struggle to overcome the other but cannot because each contains the seed of the other within it. This is

famously illustrated by the yin/yang symbol which has become very popular in the West as a symbol of harmony. In fact it is a symbol of struggle from which the dynamism which creates the energy of the universe derives and which has to be kept in balance otherwise the one would destroy the other.

The Tao is that balance and in classical Taoism, the role of humanity is to maintain that balance.

This is expressed in what is in effect the Creed of Taoism, once again found within the Tao Te Ching this time in chapter 42:

*"The Tao gives birth to the One.
The One Gives birth to the Two;
The Two Give birth to the three -
The Three give birth to every living thing.
All things are held in yin, and carry yang;
And they are held together in the ch'i of teeming energy."*

How can you cure your imbalance of yin and yang if in trying to do this, you put the balance of the whole of Nature at risk?

The Two - yin and yang - are the source of the energy giving life of all life - known as ch'i or in modern form Qi: and it is this that is the basis of Chinese Traditional Medicine (TCM).

The whole basis of TCM is the need to balance the body. Ill health is caused by either too much yin or too much yang. The role of TCM is to moderate and to harmonise these forces so as to achieve the required balance for good health. In doing so, TCM helps put you back in balance with the whole universe, back in balance with the Tao - the Way of Nature.

This is why Taoism has taken in recent years such a strong stance against the use of endangered species in TCM. The argument is simple. How can you cure your imbalance of yin and

yang if in trying to do this, you put the balance of the whole of Nature at risk? If, to cure you of some disease and excess of either yin or yang, you use an endangered animal or plant to do so, then it simply will not work. Because, in so doing, you have disturbed the precarious balance of yin and yang in the whole world, if not the whole cosmos. Wiping out entire species such as rhinos or tigers (and their extinction in the wild is now simply a matter of time) means that the health of the planet - as described in the quote from the Taoist statement above - has been thrown into turmoil. So how can a cosmos in turmoil heal you if you are the reason the cosmos is in turmoil?

This argument by the Taoist, basically saying any use of endangered species means the medicine cannot and will not work, attacks the fundamental principle of the efficacy of TCM. As such it moves far beyond the usual response of conservationists which is to tell people they MUST NOT BUY THIS..... Most conservation is Western in origin and therefore is incapable of explaining in terms relevant to TCM and to Chinese culture per se: instead it simply becomes draconian and legalistic which drives the trade underground.

Traditionally many TCM practitioners had stalls within Temple compounds - something which has been growing again - and in 2000 the Taoists issued their edict on TCM and declared that they would excommunicate anyone found using endangered species in TCM offered within temple compounds. They used this opportunity to outline the psychological message related to the practice.

Unlike the usual environmental approach of moralising, this message highlights the undermining of the theological, philosophical and psychological basis for TCM. Instead of saying you must not because its bad for the environment - something someone ill and in need is not going to be particularly concerned about - it simply says there is no point. It's not going to work, so find something else.

This is probably what will enable TCM to become more environmentally responsible.

In recent years the Chinese Taoist Association and now the Chinese Government, have become very proud of this totally Chinese philosophical and spiritual approach to a major ecological problem. In Assisi this year the Taoist renewed their commitment to this work, and the BBC carried a number of reports on this unique method of helping to tackle what is ultimately a cultural dimension problem.

Some environmentalists have said it will take too long. But then faiths deal in generations not campaigns lasting a year or two. Since 2000, the Taoist have gone back to their 1440 sacred books to search for alternative prescriptions which do not use endangered species, and that will not create new demands which will threaten other species. They have found many such prescriptions and now we are exploring how the indigenous knowledge, which these are, can be honoured in the scrabble to find new, less environmentally destructive medicine.

It is probably too late to save the wild tiger or rhino. But it might just be in time to help save TCM from itself, and to restore the balance generally around the world between yin and yang; between us and the rest of nature; and between us and Heaven. Only time, prayer and wisdom rooted over 2500 years ago will tell.

...faiths deal in generations not campaigns lasting a year or two.



*Martin Palmer is Secretary General
Alliance of Religions and Conservation.*

www.arcworld.org



Ethical Thinkers and Activists: *Forums For Change*

The call for action countering the accelerating speed of human destruction of the natural conditions of humanity's own existence has become common place. Equally familiar is the shrugging of shoulders that nothing can be done about it because destructive habits are rooted not only in industrially magnified greed but in culture, if not in human biology, and hence are difficult to change.

Yet, human feelings and attitudes towards animals and other forms of non-human life vary greatly across cultures and time and are changeable. The continuing cultural influence of religious and philosophical reflection on human behaviour cannot be underestimated, and it is here, at the doctrinal roots of widespread habits and customs, that a fruitful debate on conditions and prospects for attitudinal change may be engendered.

At this time of rapid globalisation, worldwide environmental destruction and palpable existential uncertainty, few universally oriented deliberations on practical ethics across religious, and cultural boundaries, are on record. To the contrary, the lamented process of universal self-destruction is defended in the name of a combination of pragmatic necessity and entrenched value orientations and habits.

The lack of public reflection on the value and the limitations of received religious paradigms and intellectual habits across cultures, concerning the welfare of animals and plants, needs to be addressed by opening up a new dialogue between thinkers and activists from different religious and philosophical backgrounds, on the global problem of biodiversity conservation and animal welfare.

New forums need to be created for discussion and dialogue between scholars, activists, ethical and philosophical thinkers reflecting on the potential of existing cultural, religious and philosophical resources contributing to new trans-cultural orientations towards the preservation of human and non-human forms of life.

Traditional religious leaders, instinctively resistant to change, need to be engaged, but will react belatedly to changes in public perception. The initiative for change must come from outside the established religious institutions which can be a key to foster new attitudes to the human environment and hence to preservation of the biosphere as the condition of human survival.

Combined with human self-interest, the most pertinent motives for protecting living entities from unrestrained destruction are still derived from religious and philosophical ethics. The most widespread conceptual resource is animism, embracing not only humans but also animals and often plants and other entities. Animistic worldviews are frequently associated with theories of rebirth and reincarnation which can and have been ethicised in one way or another. In spite of the

absence of proof, rightly or wrongly, the existence of an individual soul or self is posited by most human beings and religious and philosophical traditions. But not all attribute consciousness to animals and plants as well.

One of the most comprehensive ethicised theories of animism ever conceived is the classical Jaina soul-body dualism, which postulates that not only humans, animals and plants, but also the elements fire, water, air and earth are animated by individual life-giving spiritual substances, *ātman* or *jīva*, which are endowed with consciousness and will-power. Souls or selves are conceived as immortal substances which trapped themselves in their respective incarnations as a consequence of committing injury, *hiṃsā*, to other sentient entities. Since it is assumed that violent acts rebound on the embodied soul in form of karmic particles which constitute physical bodies by attaching themselves to the soul like grains of dust, only non-violent action and finally non-action will, in the long term, assure the purification of the soul. In this version of animism, the self-oriented desire for salvation is predicated on the protection of life. Classical Jainism is not interested in the protection of the environment per se. Jain non-violence is motivated primarily by soteriological self-interest.

Even if stripped from some now implausible metaphysical and cosmological ballast, which may seem outdated in the light of modern scientific discoveries, the question remains which elements of Jain doctrine and historical experience, especially the values of non-violence, non-attachment and non-one-sidedness, represent globally important intellectual and cultural resources which are potentially universally acceptable and may serve as elements for a future globalized environmental ethics. The question to what extent the Jain value of non-violence, dis-embedded from some of its specific Indic cultural elements, could serve as one of the bedrocks for a universal minimal ethic of the future that could re-motivate human beings to pursue less destructive ways of life, is just one example of the dilemma of ethical pluralism.

The propagation of the values of a particular religious or philosophical tradition will not be acceptable to humanity as a whole. But useful individual ideas, values and practices can travel easily across cultural and religious boundaries if they are perceived as helpful for improving the common good. We need to collect and discuss proven good ideas for the preservation of the biosphere from the traditions of this world. This is in our self-interest. If technology can succeed, why not religious and philosophical ethics as well?

...the most pertinent motives for protecting living entities from unrestrained destruction are still derived from religious and philosophical ethics.

Dr. Peter Flügel is Chair, Centre of Jaina Studies, Department of the Study of Religions, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London



WOMEN of the *Arab Spring*

Among my circle of friends there are Libyans, Egyptians, Sudanese and Algerians, and I once knew a wonderful family from Yemen. I know them well enough to recognise that they would not like to be called 'Arabs' simply because they are not, and they are quite proud of their identity. I have had their home-cooked authentic food and the cuisine of one country from another is quite different - though similarities may be there - and culturally each is unique too. In Oxford, where I live, Syrians own two of my favourite restaurants and they serve cuisine from the 'Sham' region. The Arabic they speak is quite different, and many of them will not understand each other if they were to speak in their own particular or regional language. Their native Arabic is different from the classical Arabic of The Qur'an. Monolithic culture it is not. The "Arab spring" therefore is a misnomer. However, whatever loose term we may give it for want of a better description, 'spring' it is, and long overdue for the Arabic speaking people. There is much to celebrate, much to speculate, much to anticipate and much to be concerned about. The unacceptable loss and torture of civilians was / is a defiant response to the counter-force the protestors have managed to unleash. There were some images at the culmination of the Libyan revolution, shown on television and flashed around on the internet and print media, that were strictly "un-Islamic" - terrifyingly disturbing and devoid of all human decency...but let us hope they can be confined to the pages of history for good.

As the events unfolded in the different Muslim countries, the participation of ordinary people gathered momentum and the Media captured the participation of women and children alongside the men. It was certainly positive viewing as the Media is traditionally inclined to portray Muslim women in Muslim countries half-heartedly, and sometimes patronisingly - not giving them credit for what they do. While women's role in the

revolt did not surprise me, the visibility of women may have been conspicuous for those unfamiliar with the reality of Muslim women in general, and Arabic speaking women in particular. The right of participation in public affairs as the right of election and nomination to political offices are among the legal status of women given in Islam. The Qur'an appoints men and women each other's 'awliya' or guides/in charge of one another: "*The believers, both men and women, support each other; they order what is right, and forbid what is wrong...*" (9:71-72). The Qur'an affirms that moral agency is gender neutral and both sexes have a mutual role of guardianship towards each other.

I know, and know of, women sharing either my linguistic, ethnic, cultural or religious roots to have been part of the ripple of their times, resilient but undiscovered heroes in their own backyard. There are also those who have transcended their era to be historical figures. Activities of early Muslim women from the time of the Noble Prophet (*pbuh*) will show that women were far more progressive for their times. Nusaiba (wife of Zaid Ibn Asim) and Hind bint Utbah took part in military service. They were women warriors equal with men in the use of sword. Women performed welfare activities during the battles and humanitarian duties in the battlefield. They were active in community and political affairs and issues of the day, and had a strong public voice, even if it meant debate and dissent. No mean feat considering this was around AD 610 to after 632.

The Egyptian novelist, militant writer and women's rights' activist Nawal El Saadawi overcame challenges as a woman of rural origin to qualify as a doctor in 1955, became Director of Public Health, and enjoyed other distinguished positions until she courted notoriety for being on the wrong side of the law, was dismissed and suffered imprisonment under the Sadat regime.

*The Qur'an
affirms that
moral agency
is gender
neutral...*

17th February 2012 marks the 1st anniversary of the Libyan revolution when Libyans living in the UK demonstrated in London. Among them was my friend of Libyan heritage who lost quite a few relatives killed by Government loyal forces in their hometown. Sad at the loss and fearful of further loss, they accepted however, that such sacrifice would earn them freedom in due course - holding on to determination and optimism. They speak proudly of the huge amount of contribution made by the Libyan women and how, at each step of the way, they complemented men's struggle for independence. The self-equipped contingent of women opened their houses to injured soldiers, and gave temporary shelter to freedom fighters when they needed to hide from authority. To welcome strangers to your home, risking your own life, and the lives of your children was an act beyond the call of their duty and we must applaud them for quick thinking, selflessness and bravery. They started an 'open kitchen' in their homes, cooking and distributing food for the men active in the revolution. They

supported their sons, brothers and husbands in their decision to go and fight. They kept diaries of important incidents and victories for their progeny, and the history books, so that the sacrifices of their men, and of course of many women, who were tortured, are not lost in the desert sands of time but can shape the future. Aya Jibali, a British Muslim of Libyan heritage, is a 1st year University student. She says she was upset when Gaddafi forces were killing people and prayed for the success of the revolution. She wished she was in Libya in the early days of post-liberation to help out the women who were hosting celebratory 'bazaars'/ temporary street markets with cooked food, and were giving out handmade bracelets with Libyan revolutionary flag motifs.

I asked a couple of my friends here in the UK about their perception of women's involvement in the Arab spring. Were they surprised? For an objective response, I chose Asian rather than Arabic speaking Muslim women. Dr. Sariya Contractor, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Derby, author of *Muslim Women in Britain - De-mystifying the Muslimah* (July 2012) says:

Historically, Muslim women in the Middle East have had varying degrees of public visibility in the different countries that experienced the Arab spring. Egypt for example has a long history of women activists who fought for social and political gains. Some Egyptian women, such as Zainab Ghazali, have sought to work within Islamic frameworks and have used the Shar'iah in their arguments. Other women have chosen to use different philosophical stances such as Western liberalism to frame their activism - feminist Huda Shaarwi for example famously removed her headscarf as part of her activism. Both Huda and Zainab made similar points about women's rights but they chose paths that were antagonistic to each other's stance. This same multiplicity of standpoints is evident in the voices and images of Muslim women's involvement in the Arab spring - women wearing headscarfs and women who did not. In either case these women were fighting together with their men for a cause, and together both men and women were being an inspiration, motivating others to follow in their footsteps. They encouraged bystanders to become actors by joining into the cause. In countries other than Egypt this has been surprising and could be because of the inspirational and evocative images that came out of Tahrir Square in which women were prominent. As protestors in other countries

they appreciated the activism of not just men but also women, and they were encouraged to facilitate similar dynamics in their own struggles.

Women's visibility in the Arab spring did not surprise me but it did definitely inspire me. As a woman and a Muslim (who sometimes calls herself an Islamic Feminist), what I see in the Arab spring resonates with my own theorising and research around Muslim women's feminisms. Two learning points have hit home most strongly, firstly that men and women work together whether it is theological interpretations or political activism and secondly, women come together even though in some aspects they hold ideological and philosophical differences. There is considerable acrimony, generally, between women activists with either camp criticising the work of their co-activist who use philosophies and methods different from their own. However, the Arab spring seems to have brought up a change in these estranged relationships among sisters. Since the cause for freedom was so great women were able to put aside some of their differences and work together. One of the most inspirational images for me was of a procession of women activists in Egypt - some had headscarfs on, others wore bandanas and still others did not wear any head cover at all - what is important is that all these women were

A former journalist Sarah Sheriff who has a background in Middle East History & Politics says:

I was not surprised as women have been involved in resistance to Western-supported dictatorships for decades and have suffered martyrdom. I think what was different with this one was that rather than isolated figures putting their heads over the parapet whilst the rest of their compatriots looked the other way through

fear, a comfortable life etc, what has pervaded the mass population of many of these countries was lack of fear of death and injury. I feel that we have not done enough to equally champion women's struggle against Yemeni, Bahraini and Israeli repression.

The 'Bahrain Center for Human Rights' (BCHR) reported that Zainab Al-Khawaja, a democracy activist and blogger, was arrested recently, for the second time in the last two months, while marching peacefully towards the Pearl Roundabout in Manama. The Public Prosecution Office has charged her with "illegal gathering of more than five people". Bahraini women have earned a place in the forefront of the revolt through their planning and leading the pro-democracy protests. Lamees Dhaif, an outspoken award-winning Bahraini journalist and human rights activist says that women activists have been easy targets of abuses and atrocities because of their direct involvement but it is highly unlikely that this will deter them from their path.

A handful of Yemeni women from different backgrounds united together to campaign for their equal rights and to secure other rights for women during the early days of the Yemeni uprising. They did so while maintaining traditional segregation by putting up a concealed enclosure with fences and straw mats at the heart of 'Change Square' in the capital Sanaa. Gradually more and more Yemeni women became vocal in anti-Government demonstrations. Some hundreds of women protestors sent out a defiant message by burning in public their 'makramas' or traditional black veils following the killing of some of their fellow activists by the regime. Yemeni activist Doctor Jamila Al-Kameli explains that having lost faith in the international community to do anything they decided to adopt this tribal 'Bedouin' tradition of veil burning to highlight that the dignity of Muslim women

[veil symbolising dignity & personal protection] have been compromised by the brutality they have suffered in the revolution.

And as I write, the crisis in Syria is becoming catastrophic, with daily bombardment by government forces leaving many citizens - men, women and children - dead or injured, and others without shelter during an unseasonal inclement winter. Some cities are isolated from the outside world with no access to food and water, electricity or medicine. Yesterday my husband told me about the very moving and graphic report, by Marie Colvin, of a grieving mother and her dying child in Homs. I had missed the coverage and was planning to google it when I found out to my horror that Colvin herself was one of the latest casualties. She was a passionate humanitarian and an exceptionally good journalist - a remarkable combination. She will be a hard act to follow, and many innocent people will suffer without someone of her calibre to look out for them, and report on their plight to the outside world. Colvin's death reiterates in the most frightful way the carnage of the civilians she was reporting on.

There is no doubt that in countries, such as Syria, Bahrain and Yemen the Arab spring is under threat and we need to ask ourselves: "what can we do to help?" How far will our collective responsibility take us? Will the international community merely resemble the 'Chorus' of a Greek Tragedy that only offers the audience a running commentary, or will it become an actor within the drama that unfolds?

*The self-equipped
contingent of women
opened their houses to
injured soldiers, and
gave temporary shelter
to freedom fighters when
they needed to hide
from authority.*

Since the cause for freedom was so great women were able to put aside some of their differences and work together.

Editorial Note:

*We congratulate Shiban on receiving an
Honorary OBE for services to the Muslim Community.*



BELIEF IN DIALOGUE

In March 2011 the Scottish Government published a document called 'Belief in Dialogue, Religion and Belief Relations in Scotland, a Good Practice Guide'. It was written by a working group made up of individuals with experience in interfaith relations who came from both religious and non-religious belief communities. Its purpose was 'to help provide guidance on building good relations among and between religious and belief communities and to help develop multifaceted approaches to interaction and dialogue'. It is a very useful document and gives a lot of practical advice about setting up interfaith groups and conducting dialogue sessions.

When the working group was set up in 2008 there was a general concern about the impact of equality legislation which outlawed discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief. This legislation recognised that people had beliefs which influenced their way of life and impacted on their behaviour and that they had the right to hold and express those beliefs.

Discriminating on the basis of people's beliefs was wrong. But for a time it seemed that religion and belief were to be classed together and there was a sense that religions could not meet or dialogue with one another without opening the conversation to what were called belief groups. There was a certain amount of pressure for interfaith groups and bodies to extend their membership to people of non-religious beliefs. Inclusivity and equality were taken as absolutes and it was very difficult to argue against this without seeming exclusive or unfair. There were, however, difficulties in this approach and it raised a number of questions which the working group had to tackle:

- What is the relationship between religious and non religious beliefs, are they to be treated as one and the same?
- Is there a place for religious people to speak out from the basis of their faith in a secular society or is it only 'secular beliefs' that have a place in such a society?
- Is religion to be relegated to the private sphere with no place in public life?
- Is it acceptable for religious groups to dialogue with one another or has interfaith dialogue to be inclusive of everyone?

The document attempts to answer these questions. It recognises that beliefs are an important element of a person's identity, that people have the right to their own beliefs and values, that people have the right to speak from these beliefs when contributing to civic life and that different religious and non-religious beliefs are to be respected as part of the diversity

of society. It is quite clear that religions and religious people do have the right, as do others, to express themselves in the public sphere and that equality legislation is not about doing away with difference but rather recognising difference as a contribution to the richness of society which should be respected and appreciated. While we want to rejoice in our common humanity and citizenship, we also want to rejoice in our differences for surely it is this which makes us interesting. However sometimes beliefs and values which are good in themselves can clash and

'dialogue brings us together; removes fear of the unknown; helps us to find common ground; builds friendships; and challenges the stigmatisation which holds back many individuals and communities'

our differences can lead to tension. Strongly held and strongly expressed beliefs can build barriers between people and communities, lead to fear and distrust of those who are different from us and undermine community cohesion and harmony. The way out of this difficulty is dialogue.

In his foreword to the document Fergus Ewing, who was at the time Minister for Community Safety in the Scottish Government, describes dialogue as the basic building block of a society in which everyone is valued. He suggests that 'dialogue brings us together; removes fear of the unknown; helps us to find common ground; builds friendships; and challenges the stigmatisation which holds back many individuals and communities'. Dialogue has an important and even necessary place in a society that values trust, respect and peaceful co-existence. But who is to dialogue and how?

There are many organisations in society that focus on dialogue but here in Britain we have a very good record of interfaith relations. Those of us involved in it know the importance of openness and attention to other people's views and the need for constant negotiation as we try to work together in a spirit of friendship while balancing real and important differences. *Belief in Dialogue* gives many practical examples of how to set up dialogue groups and conduct dialogue, some of which will deal with difficult and thorny issues but some of which are events which lead to mutual understanding of one another's faith and develop the kind of friendship that is the basis on which difficult and honest conversations can take place. When the focus for dialogue is a civic issue then it is possible and good that it be open to people of non-religious beliefs. This does not mean, however, that religious groups do not have the right to meet together and engage in their own dialogues. The document recognises different kinds of dialogue with their own particular contexts and processes. Bi-lateral dialogues have their own particular

concerns, agenda and dynamic as do multi-lateral dialogues, as do religious and belief dialogues. interfaith groups do not need to feel that they are failing in equality or inclusion if they limit their meetings to particular religious faiths. We know that the type of conversations we have with our families, our friends, our acquaintances and colleagues are different. Different common concerns and interests, different relationships call for different kinds of conversations. To limit a conversation to family in a family matter is not to be exclusive or rejecting of others but simply to recognise the context in which the conversation is taking place. So too with interfaith groups. There are some issues that are not the concern of religious and non-religious belief groups together and some issues that are not the concern of all religious groups. It is important that interfaith groups are clear about why they come together, what their agenda is and be open to the occasions when it is appropriate to extend the dialogue to others.

“ the holy man or woman of our time is ...a figure like Gandhi, a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions and comes back again with new insight into his own... Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time”

Belief in Dialogue is the first document to come from the Scottish Government which deals with dialogue but there have been others published by the Westminster Government though these have focussed on interreligious dialogue and not extended the dialogue to belief groups. These documents show the importance that Governments place on interfaith dialogue as a means of social cohesion. Those of us involved in dialogue know full well how important this is and have, I am sure, often quoted Hans Kung's famous dictum about no peace in the world without peace among the religions and no peace among the religions until there is dialogue between them. But there are other reasons for engaging in dialogue. For some communities the motivation might be the desire to have their place within society recognised alongside more established and more numerous communities. For others the dialogue is a genuine religious experience. More than thirty years ago an American theologian, John Dunne, predicted that (quoted in Paul Knitter's 'Without Buddha I could not be a Christian' p.217). interfaith dialogue can be a spiritual adventure. It can take us into the world of another where we can recognise universal truths and wisdom and see our own in a new light. This is the kind of dialogue that leads to personal transformation and a deepening of faith. Important as social cohesion is it would be a pity if this dimension of interfaith dialogue was forgotten or lost as, in my opinion, it is the very soul of dialogue.

Follow the truth wherever you find it
Even if it takes you outside your preconceived idea of God or life
Even if it takes you outside your own country
Into the most significant alien places
Like Bethlehem
Be courageous. But concentrate on your own search
Truth is one. All roads lead to home.

by George MacLeod



Footnote:

In the Foreword to the document the Minister tells us 'the basic building blocks of a society where everyone is valued is dialogue'.

Without dialogue we are in danger of living in isolation and even hostility.

With dialogue we can live in friendship, cooperate to make Scotland a country where all will feel at home, all will feel valued for the contribution they have to make to the common good.

All citizens of Scotland share a common humanity but it is also important to rejoice in our differences which in dialogue do not set us apart but allow us to work together for a truly just and inclusive Scotland.

This is the philosophy behind 'Belief in Dialogue' It builds on the good work that has

gone on in inter - religious dialogue and recognises that must continue. But it also recognises that this needs to be extended beyond religion to other groups and that they too have to engage in dialogue.

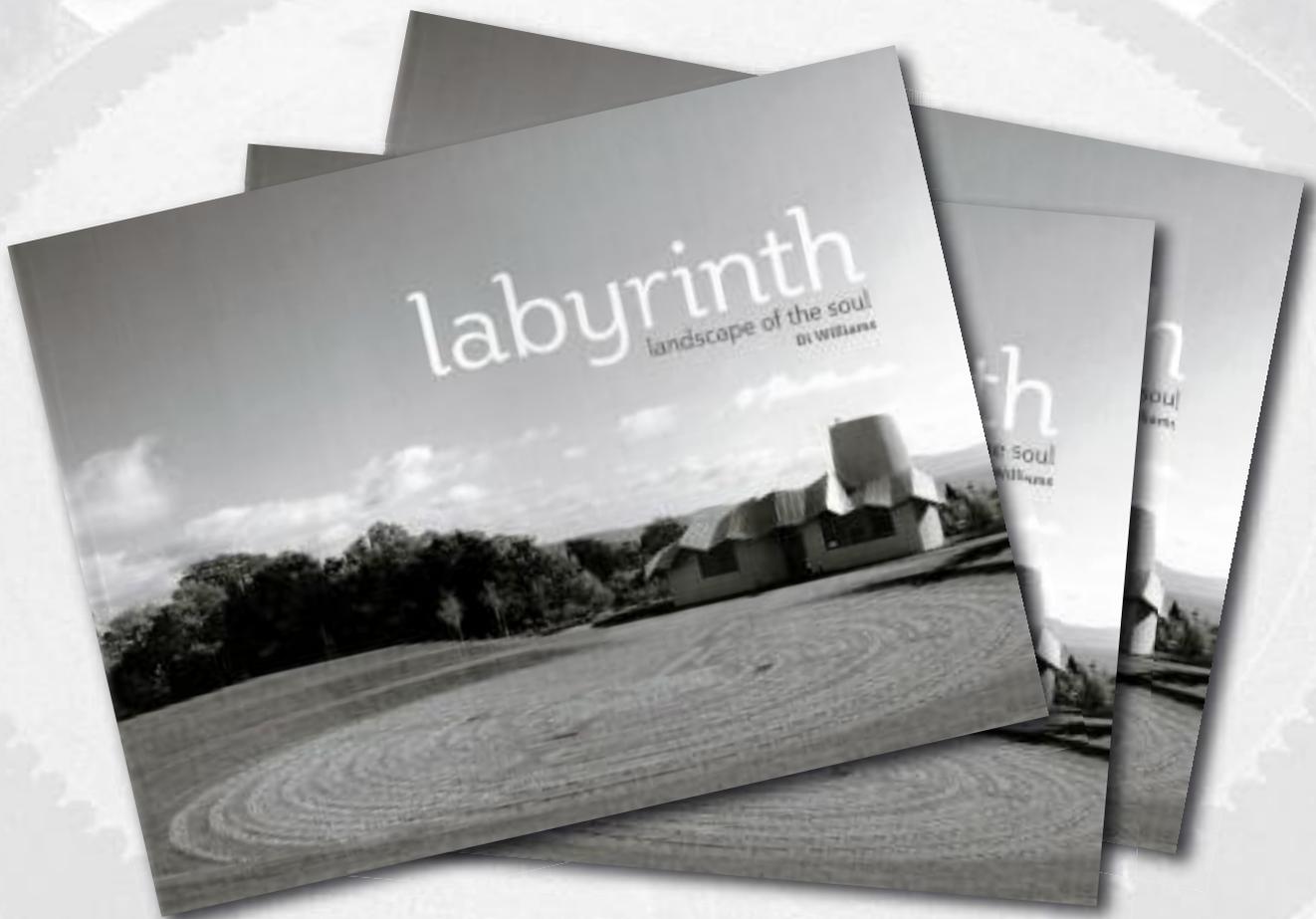
There is plenty of practical advice in the Guide and we hope it will be useful to all kinds of belief groups, interfaith groups, local authorities, statutory and voluntary bodies- in fact anyone interested in dismantling barriers that keep people from understanding and respecting one another.

The Guide will only be useful if it is used and so I commend it to you. You can also contribute to it. As an on-line resource it can be added to and developed.

Please see www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011 for further information.

labyrinth landscape of the soul by Di Williams

Wild Goose Publications 2011 | ISBN 978-1-84952-185-7



This is a wonderfully informative and contemplative book by Di Williams, on labyrinths in the UK and the wider world. As well as giving an historical perspective to our understanding of labyrinths, it offers the reader practical help on how to walk a labyrinth and even create one.

Spiritual insight is given into the process that takes place within the person as they journey to and from the centre of the labyrinth. This is given in a variety of ways, primarily through the writer's vast knowledge and experience of working with groups and individuals using labyrinths, but also by contemplative quotes, poetry and personal reflections that help to take us on that meditative inner journey towards the soul. The writer also demonstrates, in a creative way, the versatile use of labyrinths and their appeal as a universal symbol of sacred space.

The book is beautifully illustrated with the writer's own photographs, and these enhance the contemplative nature of the text. The images imaginatively demonstrate how labyrinths are used, and provide the reader with immediate access to mentally

walking a labyrinth. Although many of the photographs show existing labyrinths in a variety of contexts, the writer's clever use of the camera also demonstrates how to create your own seven-circuit-labyrinth, in a step-by-step format. Each of the nine stages has been drawn on sand and photographed to show how uncomplicated and versatile the creation of a labyrinth can be. Beauty lies in its simplicity.

I have no doubt that this book will appeal to many readers of different faiths and none: the individual who wants to learn more about labyrinths for their own personal meditative use: families with young children who wish to create and use a labyrinth for fun, whilst at the same time nurturing a spiritual awareness: professionals who work with different age groups in various contexts such as schools, religious organisations, hospices, festivals and conferences.

I really enjoyed this book both as a practical guide and as a means of understanding the spiritual nature of the journey taken by walking the labyrinth.

Di Williams is an Anglican priest, spiritual accompanier, writer and the first Labyrinth Master Teacher in the UK. In 2008 she was awarded the MBE for her Services to Higher Education.

St Bridget and the Snowdrops

*She plucked out snowdrops till her fingers numbed
white to chilled nails. She spread flowers in clay bowls
in chapel before dusk prayers by candles' light.
She folded her hands to shadow inside her habit
trying, when bowing before the crucifix,
not to find beauty's pain in such small flowers.*

*Her beauty haunted her; remarks, friends' smiles,
meant kindly, shouts from passing carts, the bows
deeper than needed, stage whispers behind smooth hands,
the guilt at overhearing courtiers' flattery-
that, and the risk of love that followed her
until barred by the convent's bolted years.*

*Insistent beauty: wax light spread through petals,
foam under keel, flocks' overlapping wings,
freedom of gulls she'd welcomed in first light
of this new island. Here she would sow quiet words
fragile as the small white bulbs beneath the flowers,
seek kindness through the green grain of the Spring.*

*She'd winced at harsh word, vanity, and confessed
that glance into the glass, to find it held
the same soft looks that once prized furs and rings;
repented of urge to take a blade to scar it.
'Quiet,' said the voice that blessed her holiness.
'Rest in this inner snow's small parable.'*

© Martyn Halsall



THE ONE *and* THE MANY

'We learn from History that we do not learn from History'

This quote can seem pessimistic and even defeatist but upon encountering it for the first time I have chosen to take it as a challenge, to be the exception and learn from past mistakes.

I recently visited Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi built concentration/death camp. The trip, arranged through my school, was only a day long but it was the most meaningful and taxing, emotionally and physically, day of my life. I still feel awed when I say that I have been there; stood on the train tracks and visited the bunkers where the victims were forced to live. There are no words to describe the variety of feelings you discover when you are there. It felt surreal!

On arrival in Oswiecim, the original Polish name for Auschwitz, we visited the Jewish Cemetery. On first glance it looked as if no-one visited for there were no flowers anywhere. We were then informed that it is a Jewish tradition not to leave flowers for the dead, but to leave stones and rocks instead. These were placed on every single one of the graves and the absoluteness of them showed the solidarity of the Jewish people - flowers wither and die but stones will remain forever.

Many people imagine Auschwitz as devoid of nature, a barren and ugly place but when I visited this was not the case. On seeing some of my photographs many people have commented on how nice the place looked, and asked where I went on



holiday. This may seem wrong, that a site where so many horrors occurred could seem so beautiful, but I believe it is important to see how nature itself has rebounded from the Holocaust: to show how the planet has the capacity to evolve and move on from heinous acts, to adapt into a more loving and peaceful world.

The entire day was thought-provoking and full of lessons we could learn, but I was most affected after entering the gas chamber. Silence is demanded, as a sign of respect for all those people who died there, but it also gave me chance to think. Truly think about my life, and what I could do with it. Walking out of that room, where so many had entered to never exit again, made me realise just how precious life is: not just my life but every life regardless of age, religion or race. Everyone has the capacity to make the world a better place and no one should have the right to take that away from anyone.

Auschwitz I was the concentration or labour camp, Auschwitz II or Birkenau was the death camp: the site of the most famous train track in history. We climbed the guard tower at the entrance to Birkenau and looking from the top you could see the size of the camp; and imagine the scale of the entire Holocaust. Just thinking about it is frightening, but actually seeing the tonnes of hair, the masses of suitcases, glasses and shoes speaks fathoms of the severity of the Holocaust. It is one of those events most people know of but never really think about. Most people think of the figure 6 million: 6 million Jews slaughtered in the Holocaust, but that's all they think about. Not the individuals, the stories behind each digit. There were masses of belongings at Auschwitz and everyone will be drawn to different items. For me it was a doll, clearly belonging to a small child, with its head smashed in half. Suddenly I didn't see swarms of strangers getting off the train but one small girl, crying as her doll is taken away from her. To recognise that the figure 6 million is made up of individual human beings, just like

Suddenly I didn't see swarms of strangers getting off the train but one small girl...

me or you, is one of the most vital lessons to be learnt from the Holocaust; they had families and pets and best friends. They had no less right to life than we do, for they were exactly the same as us.

My classmate, Louise Munro, and I were selected to go on this educational trip, the aim being to learn from this horrible event and to teach these lessons to others upon our return.

The 27th of January is the annual Holocaust Memorial Day and the theme for 2012 is 'Speak Up, Speak Out'. This reminds me of the famous poem by Martin Niemöller:

'First they came for the communists but I was not a communist so I did not speak out. Then they came for the Socialists and the Trade Unionists, but I was neither, so I did not speak out. Then they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew so I did not speak out. Then they came for me and there was no-one left to speak out for me.'

The poem really makes me think about discrimination and prejudice, not just against Jews - because the Holocaust did not persecute only Jews, but homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and many more as well. Could the next persecuted society be the one you belong to; or a religion you believe in; or a political party you support. Everyone has different beliefs and we need to learn to co-exist; not persecute those different to ourselves because they could, in turn, just as easily persecute us. The poet Niemöller tells it as it is, if you don't help someone, no-one will help you. That's not a world I want to live in - neither, I'm sure, do you - so let's change it! **Speak up, speak out!** Make a difference; make a change, no matter how small.

Our Lady's Catholic College Sixth Form, Lancaster UK



a practice of

FAITH

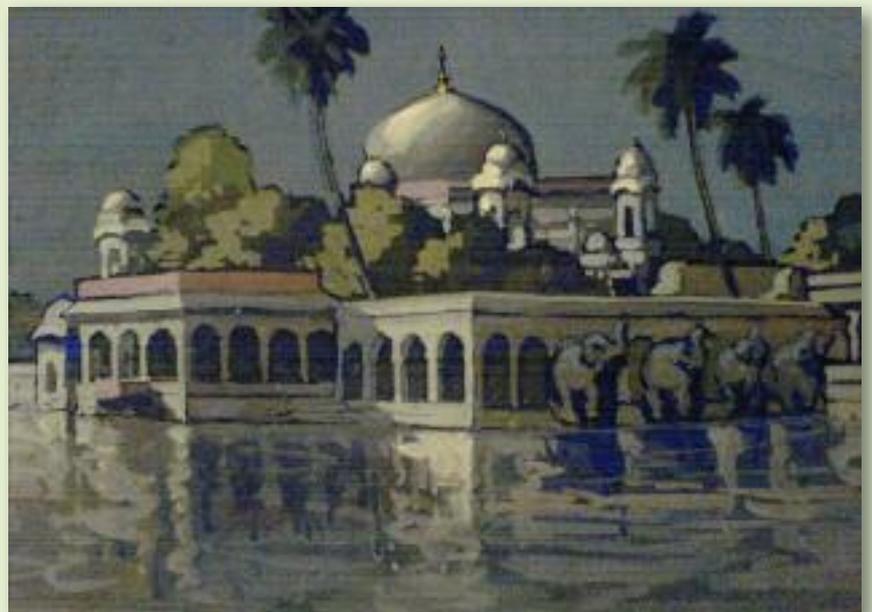
THE ART OF SHAIKH MOHAMMAD ISHAQ

My father, was born in India before its independence. At a young age he had a passion for art and in 1949 took his first steps into the field that would become his forte. He began his career in glass painting and sign writing and in 1952 quickly moved to working full time in the Indian film industry, making display banners and posters for leading films.

After 15 years working in the film industry he studied art in the famous JJ School of Arts in Mumbai. In 1961 he completed a five-year diploma in fine art. After migrating to the UK in 1967 he had the opportunity to work as a graphic designer creating music record sleeves and package design. He was subsequently engaged by many established publishers as an illustrator, notably the Saudi Research Company, as well as on children's books. He faced many challenges with the advent of computer based illustrations as naturally the demand for hand illustrations decreased.



Quaranic Calligraphy Khate Thuluth



India Jodhpur Shahimehel (watercolour)



Quranic Calligraphy watercolour



Bismillah Khatadewani

Rewriting verses of the Quran is in itself considered a religious act...

Although he became a humble expert in his field he still felt a part of his heart was not completely content. At this pivotal moment he discovered Islamic Art. The beauty, symmetry, geometry and deep rooted history of Art in Islam captivated his interest and ever since Islamic Art has shaped his artistic expression. Possessing a background in Fine Art as well as the ability to produce the various styles (or khats) of Arabic calligraphy enables him to display both the illumination and calligraphy in his pieces.

While most of his work has been self-taught he gained most inspiration when exhibiting his work in the International Quranic exhibition in Tehran in 2000. He was later invited to be a participant again in 2007. It was a fulfilling experience for him to meet others from around the world who shared the same passion and enthusiasm for calligraphy.

He has exhibited his fine art work in India and Yorkshire, England. His calligraphy and illumination work have been exhibited in Iran and in various parts of London most significantly at the prestigious Alexandra Palace during Islam Expo. One of his major achievements was winning an award in the International Calligraphy Competition organised by The Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (Turkey) and obtaining his Fine Art Diploma.

Rewriting verses of the Quran is in itself considered a religious act and calligraphy is much revered because of its religious associations. The aesthetic energy, devotion and sincerity that my father delivers in his art are a practice of faith. Watching him work I can sense his quest in learning to constantly improve his style. While his visually graceful work makes a modest contribution to this growing field, his hope is that the level of Arabic calligraphy continues to remain on a level with the status of Art itself.

Afroz Shaikh



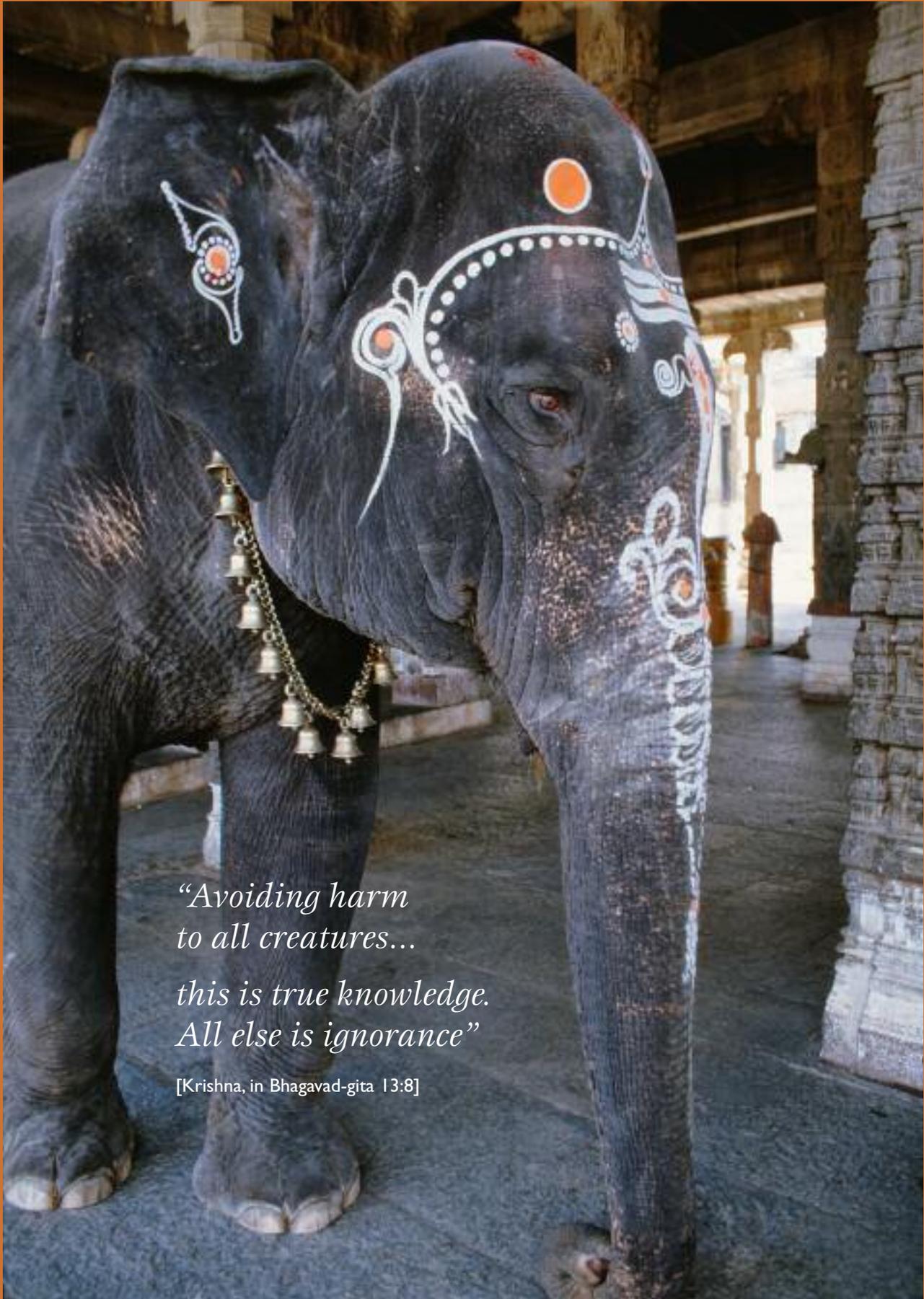
Painting of desert



Naat Shaikh Saadi Khate Juli - Thuluth



Madina before 18th century



*“Avoiding harm
to all creatures...
this is true knowledge.
All else is ignorance”*

[Krishna, in Bhagavad-gita 13:8]

Photographer David Rose writes:

We were visiting temples in Tamil Nadu, S.India. It was a baking hot day and I stood waiting in the shade of the Mandir for my eyes to adjust to the gloom. I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned to find this amazing creature and was humbled that such a magnificent animal could be so gentle.