



ISSUE 27

faith

INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

what matters is
being spontaneously
open to the reality
of God

Thomas Merton
The Springs of Contemplation

PATHWAYS OF THE SOUL

Young Faith

A CEREMONY OF LIGHT

Narrative through Symbol

FAITH TO TRANSFORM

Organ Donation

WINNER:
SHAP AWARD 2011

Prayer is not asking for
what you think you want.

But in asking to be changed
in ways you can't imagine.

Kathleen Norris
Author of *The Cloister Walk* 1997 Riverhead



Cloisters: Iona Abbey
Photograph by Monica Smith

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editorial

Whilst we have had little sunshine this summer, especially here in the North of the country, it has been a season of glorious events that gave rise to an inner glow of well-being and an outer radiance of friendliness and goodwill. I speak specifically of the energy generated by the Olympics and the Paralympics which seems to have created, for many, a wave of optimism that inspired us as individuals and transformed the negative outlook of the media at all levels. You may say that we were living in a rarefied atmospheric bubble but I for one did not want that bubble to burst. It all started with the Olympic torch relay - when, like many, I stood in the pouring rain and high winds on the promenade of Morecambe Bay to see the Olympic flame being carried by a very happy young man in a wheelchair - and culminated in the closing ceremony of the Paralympics. I was therefore extremely pleased when Canon Chris Chivers proposed that he write a reflection on the opening ceremony of the Olympics, viewing it through the lens of religious ritual and folk narrative. He conveys through his writing the sense of wonder experienced on the night as cynicism melted away and we opened our hearts and minds to what London 2012 had to offer. But the inclusivity proposed did not embrace everyone and a positive legacy is therefore now paramount to ensure that the disadvantaged, especially children, have the opportunity to benefit from the massive investment in the Games. Much of the responsibility will be left with teachers and it is therefore particularly appropriate that we feature a review of *The Magic Weaving Business* - a book that provides an insight into the characteristics and imagination that enables some teachers to weave magic on the sports field and in the classroom, so enthralling and inspiring their pupils. The importance of learning is also central to the message conveyed by our keynote writer Professor Dawud Noibi, who draws on the work of Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr to encourage young Muslims to study their Islamic scientific tradition in order to fully realise the debt owed to it by modern Western science. It is, he believes, a wider acknowledgement and appreciation of this cross-fertilization of knowledge, and an on-going regard for the richness of Islamic heritage that could ultimately overthrow the legacy left by the disparaging writings of Orientalists, and their modern day equivalents. By supporting young people in their search for deeper understanding of their religion in the context and acceptance of modernity, we can, he says, help them live a life profoundly enriched by spiritual and moral values. Such wisdom is a source of inspiration for us all.

Heather Wells

We thank all our contributors - writers, artists, poets and photographers - and of course subscribers. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of donors, who wish to remain anonymous. To sustain and develop the magazine however we need regular financial donations. If any readers know of Trust Funds, Grants or private donors who may be willing to help with funding, however big or small, the Editor (Heather Wells) would appreciate your advice and/or recommendations. For contact details please see above.



www.faithinitiative.co.uk

Initiative Interfaith Trust
Registered Charity No. 1113345

Trustees: Heather Wells, Lorna Douglas
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 28 Themes:

- Faith and Disability
- The concept of Good and Evil

Front cover: Bharathantnyam (Indian classical dance) students of Mrs. Piramila Ramanan, dancing at the Shree Ghanapathy Temple Ther (Chariot) Festival in Wimbledon on Sunday 29th July 2012. Photo: © David Rose

Design & Print: Print Graphic Ltd
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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

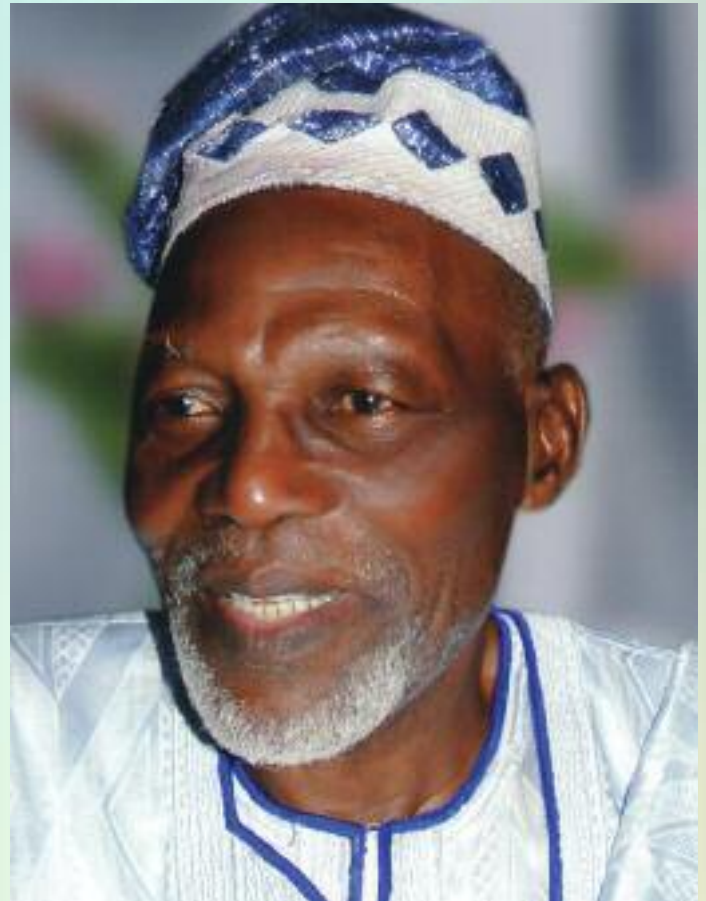
The spiral logo was designed by Caroline Jariwala
for Initiative Interfaith Trust

A Synergy of the SPIRITUAL^{and} the SECULAR

inevitably and understandably, conflict occurs more often than not between religious beliefs and modern secular philosophy, with the scientific and technological advancement that arose from that philosophy. Far more than older people the youths are affected by this conflict, not least because of the increasing religious awareness among young people, a phenomenon recognized globally and in all religious traditions. On the other hand, the youths are the ones that are directly exposed on a daily basis to the influence of the products of secular education and of the global media, both of which seem to acknowledge and tolerate religious values only when convenient.

Global and common to all faiths as this challenge may be, the Muslim youth seems to be more affected by it than his counterpart in any other faith. One obvious reason is that, with the fall of communism, Islam offers a distinct alternative to the worldview of the modern West. It is for this reason that I hereby illustrate the conflict under review and the response to it with the experience of the average Muslim youth. Besides being surrounded in his daily life by the manifestations of the secular worldview of modernity, he studies the Western sciences at one level or another. There is therefore a pressing need to help him to develop in his mind a link between the Western sciences that he studies and the tenets of Islam to which he chooses to remain faithful.

Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr said it all when he emphasized in his book, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World*, the need for young Muslims to study the vast Islamic scientific tradition even as they study that of the modern West. An understanding of that tradition surely gives them a sense of pride in their own civilization because of the prestige that science has in the present day world, and which knowledge of it confers on the scientist. That sense of pride is deepened, no doubt, by the increasing realization of the indebtedness of modern science and Western civilization to the Islamic heritage that came to Europe through Spain. Young Muslims will learn, as Professor Nasr has observed, that scientific knowledge does not necessarily conflict with faith. They will discover that the Islamic scientific tradition is indeed a testament to the way Muslims were able to cultivate various sciences without becoming alienated from the Islamic worldview; that it was not just an intellectual tradition, but one that also had a very deep spiritual significance. It was therefore a tradition that did not destroy the harmony that must exist between man and the natural environment. Above all, while



emphasizing the need to improve the quality of life in this world, it equally taught the awareness that the future life is superior to the present one, which is transient, after all.

He praised the Islamic culture in its pristine form for trying to preserve an "integrated, spiritual view of the world in a way we have not seen fit to do in recent generations in the West"

Young Muslims were inspired and motivated in this regard by some of the very courageous declarations made by HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales, over the past twenty years. In a speech at the Foreign Office Conference Centre at Wilton Park in Sussex on December 13, 1996, the Prince called for cooperation between the West and the Muslim world in a way that he believed would help young Britons to develop a healthier view of the world. He praised the Islamic culture in its pristine form for trying to preserve an "integrated, spiritual view of the world in a way we have not seen fit to do in recent generations in the West". He observed that there was much the West could learn from that Islamic worldview. Noting that there were many ways in which mutual understanding and appreciation could be built, the Prince suggested, for instance, "We could begin by having more Muslim teachers in British

schools or by encouraging exchanges of teachers". He observed: "Everywhere in the world people want to learn English. But in the West, in turn, we need to be taught by Islamic teachers how to learn with our hearts, as well as our heads".

About three years earlier, precisely on 27th October 1993, the Heir to the British throne had delivered his first major speech on the subject. As Patron of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, he suggested that "there are things for us to learn in this system of belief which I suggest we ignore at our peril". If those statements of the Prince emphasized the spiritual merits of Islam, he also drew attention to the great contributions of Islam to knowledge in general and science in particular and how the West benefited from such contributions: in mathematics with the introduction of the "Arabic numerals", the zero, Algebra and other branches of mathematics; the biological and physical sciences and particularly medicine; architecture and many other disciplines.

Against the backdrop of the above analysis, it is imperative that the Muslim youth also acquires knowledge of the roots of the culture and ideas of the modern West. Such knowledge will enable them to identify the points of agreement and those of divergence between the worldview of the modern West and the one taught by Islam. It will provide them with the means necessary to provide adequate and effective response to the challenges of the secular worldview of the West. But it will at the same time help to be able to resist the tendency to dismiss the whole of the so-called Western education as evil and therefore irrelevant to them.

The potential result of this kind of synergy is advisedly beneficial not just to the Muslim youth and consequently, the Muslim world, but also to the future development of modern Western civilization. In his famous speech of November 1993 referred to already, Prince Charles emphasized the need for the West and the Muslim world to work together in cooperation as they have much to learn from each other. Specifically, the Prince strongly advised the West to relearn spirituality from the Muslim world in order to avoid the evil consequences of materialism in the future.

Fortunately, we are slowly but surely moving away from the era when young Muslims were exposed to blatant and unveiled attacks on Islam on the pages of text books on Islam written by orientlists. Those were the days when, out of frustration, young Muslim students wrote all sorts of retorts on the margins of

such books, many of which were found in the libraries of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard, according to Professor Tibawi. Hopefully, the Western media too will further learn a lesson from such evidence of frustration that young Muslims suffer when reading unjustified disparaging remarks about their religion; remarks which they often come across in both the print and electronic media.

The positive role of the youth in religious history, from the stand point of Islam, would inspire young Muslims to dedicate themselves to the cause of their religion as well as to the cause of intellectual pursuit away from superstition. As a young man, Ibrahim (Abraham) (pbuh), persistently advised his father and the whole community against idolatry as something nonsensical (Qur'an 21: 51 – 67). Similarly, young Yusuf (Joseph) (pbuh) demonstrated profound faith in Allah as well as courage despite his tribulations (Qur'an 12: 7 – 102). Those who courageously proclaimed faith in Musa (Moses) (pbuh) against the threats of tyrannical Fir'awn (Pharaoh) (Qur'an 7: 120 – 136) were all

young men. The "Folks of the Cave" after whom a whole Surah (Chapter 18) of the Qur'an was named were all youngsters. The accounts of these young men of the past would surely impact positively on the minds of young Muslims.

The very first miracle of Jesus (pbuh), according to the Qur'anic narration, occurred when he was a baby in the cradle (Qur'an 19: 29 – 34). The story is likely to make a positive impression on young minds. Meanwhile, Muhammad (pbuh) was acclaimed by the generality of the people to be *al-Ameen*, the Trustworthy, even as a young man long before he became a Prophet. That too would remind young Muslims of the need for them to emulate him as directed by Allah in the Qur'an (Qur'an 33:21). Lastly, the roles played by such young followers of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as Ali ibn Abi Talib are likely to be sources of inspiration and motivation for young Muslims of later periods including those of our own time.

So, after all, faith could be source of inspiration and motivation for young persons to embark on positive actions that will benefit them, as well as future generations. Faith could also help in sustaining their efforts in this regard. It is therefore beneficial to support them as they seek deeper understanding of their religion and explore means of enriching life on earth with spiritual and moral values. Breaking down the barrier between religious values and modernity goes a long way in channelling energy of the youth away from destructive tendencies.

...faith could be source of inspiration and motivation for young persons to embark on positive actions that will benefit them, as well as future generations.

Professor Dawud O. S. Noibi is currently the Executive Secretary of the Muslim Ummah of South West Nigeria (MUSWEN). He had taught Islamic Studies in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan for 23 years before proceeding to the United Kingdom where he served the Muslim Community for 18 years.

While in the UK, he served in various capacities. He was Islamic Consultant to IQRA Trust, a London-based educational charity. He chaired the National Council for the Welfare of Muslim Prisoners (NCWMP) and taught Islamic Law at the Muslim College, London.

He held other positions including that of Advisor to the Muslim Association of Nigeria U.K and was a member of the Board of Counsellors of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB).

Professor Noibi was awarded the OBE by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for his "contribution to inter-faith cooperation".

TRUTH: A SHARED QUEST



I met up with a Muslim friend recently and he asked me a few interesting questions about inter faith :- Is it working? What is the purpose of the Christian Muslim Forum? Is dialogue enough when if we want to share the truth we ought to be debating?

I described to him some of our 'Near Neighbours' work:

Our work with Christian and Muslim leaders seeks to root the dialogue and engagement process in the training, development and ministry of religious leaders from both faiths. We model this through pairs of speakers, and workshop facilitators, who are able to bring qualities of both practical and theological experience and expertise. This modelling and sharing of practical experience enables leaders to encourage and support one another in creating community cohesion, particularly in urban areas. Our events focus on the experiences and needs of both young and experienced Muslim and Christian leaders to develop ideas that draw on the resources of both faiths to encourage a confident faith identity which can engage in inter faith dialogue to address local community concerns.

My friend has a particular interest in debate, especially in 'champions slugging it out in a battle for truth, with an eye on the atheist vs. religious debate. I shared with him my main concern about debate – that of point-scoring, where the most persuasive rather than the most true can 'win' – and offered the model of dialogue and conversation instead, referring to a Christian-Muslim-Humanist dialogue that I took part in last year:

How can we work through a conversation where our outlooks are very different? The example of Christian-Muslim dialogue is of people who are divided confessionally and credally but manage to talk to one another. How should religious and humanist people create a conversation and do dialogue with each other? My suggestion at the time was that this can only come about if we allow each other to be what we are, without saying we all must be the same as me. In other words, winning doesn't come into it.

However, countered my friend, isn't that exactly what we should be doing in our bid to share truth and for 'truth to stand clear

from falsehood' (Quran 2.256)? We need our champions to get in there with the killer-blow so that the opponent crumbles and everyone can see that our position, our religion is true. This is where dialogue, or inter faith debate, must go. We must challenge unbelief, or each other, with our strongest and highest-profile debaters because it will draw the crowds and interest many more people than those events where people speak nicely about each other's faiths over tea and samosas, and only 20 people turn up. He asked me if I thought that my religion (Christianity) was true and didn't that mean that it must triumph in argument, because truth will always trump any other position? I said No, I didn't see it in that way at all and didn't see how I could, even if I did believe that it was unarguably true and that therefore no valid argument could be made against it. People believing otherwise would still not accept it because no matter how true I believe my own faith to be I know others will not, our claims are competing but truth is disputed and not yet resolved.

I wasn't prepared for what came next, I was a little shocked. As religious people we do have the killer argument he said. The weakness of the atheist position is that all it has is this life and if things are unfair during this life there is no ultimate restitution. So where is the justice, what can be offered to those who are massacred or die in situations of extreme suffering? Standing up for belief in the afterlife and final judgement has great value in this debate, as those of us who believe can assure the suffering, ourselves or our debating opponents that a system is in place, there is an answer; one which atheists cannot call upon. Of course this kind of outlook is exactly where the belief in afterlife and judgement came from. It wasn't at all where my thinking was, and I offered the view that if humanism lived up to its name it would work for justice and make humanitarian interventions where people were suffering. We should be focused on action not debate, and that the limitations of physical life should be a powerful argument for showing care for others.

What I didn't do was to say that, as a Christian, I did not share his enthusiasm for hell and final judgment. Nor say that offering such an argument to an atheist would be deeply unimpressive. Nor yet that if what we have to offer to the debate, or dialogue, is final judgment then heaven forbid! No wonder non-religious people have negative views of religion.

So what can we take from this? Here are a few pointers for gentle conversation which, I hope, may encourage more peaceful dialogue between people of different beliefs and outlooks:

- *Hold your own 'truth' lightly*
- *Beware of being seduced by the urge to crush your opponent and their argument*
- *Consider whether we are offering the best of our religion*

Is there any benefit in shouting loudly 'we have the truth'? What is more likely than that your opponent will do the same thing and you will both make it clear, if it wasn't from the beginning, that neither is listening to the other? This is why dialogue is so much better than debate, because it encourages us to listen to each other, to examine both their views and ours, to encourage a better informed conversation, to get to places that debate cannot reach. In debate 'truth' can become an obstacle, a supposed shared goal that is never reached. In genuine dialogue truth is a shared quest, I have not written it with quotes in that last phrase because 'truth' is not being banged down on the table.

Particularly in dialogue with non-religious people those of us who speak from a position of faith need to work on our language and our delivery, the dialogue is as much about our manner as it is about what we say, we are either the best or the worst advert, or argument, for our faith.

Seeking to crush the other does not come from love or faith but from ego. We may feel that we have a religious duty to confront error but the strongest warnings against error in our religious traditions are the errors within ourselves, and also within our religious communities. A strong belief in God's judgment sometimes leads to us wanting to judge the other, and doing so. If we believe that the other is wrong do we wish to use wrong methods to convince them and in doing so we will be in effect proclaiming loudly that it is us who are wrong? This is part of my concern about the destructiveness of debate, that it can generate dishonesty and be conducted in a dishonest environment. We can be so sure of our own rightness that we allow ourselves all kinds of tactics, not my friend I hasten to add, but others do. In our

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excessive zeal to out-argue the other we paint the other's faith or worldview falsely, we demean it and devalue it, doing the same to ours in the process.

If you don't know whether something is true you can either take it on trust or test it. So when we dialogue, or even debate, we

have an opportunity to speak honestly about our faith, and what is so great about it. Some of the debates that I have observed on the internet (more so than face to face), and especially on Facebook lose sight of this. People are so keen to win an argument, save face and make strong points that they stray far from their religion. I have engaged with Christians online who are so against other religions, or even (maybe especially) other kinds of Christianity, that 'loving your neighbour as yourself' is furthest

from their minds. In this constructive spirit the Christian Muslim Forum offered these gracious words to encourage better regard for each other:

- *We pledge, as members of both faiths, to live up to the best of our traditions by respecting, welcoming and being hospitable to our neighbours of other faiths.*
- *We will speak generously of other faiths, scriptures and worshippers with our own congregations, while recognising we have some critical theological differences.*
- *We will engage openly and honestly with each other about our own faith and scriptures, other faiths and all issues of concern, including sensitive or painful issues. We are open to being challenged by each other.*

To my friend I say 'thank you' for getting me started on exploring this in writing and I look forward to sharing this with you in person and developing the dialogue.



The Misperception of RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

During a recent conference in Edinburgh, run by the Humanist Association of Scotland, I picked up an interesting leaflet. The leaflet is not titled, but the cover presents a picture of Descartes with “I think therefore I am” superimposed, and a young boy in school uniform superimposed with “I am what they tell me to think”. Inside the leaflet, under the title ‘A child’s right to choose’, the text reads:

‘Children deserve to be told all shades of opinion and reach their own conclusions. In most Scottish schools today religion is taught as fact, indistinguishable from the date of the battle of Hastings, the seven times table and Newton’s Laws of Motion.’

As the person responsible for a degree programme at the University of Glasgow, preparing specialist secondary school teachers of Religious, Moral and Philosophical Education, this came as something of a surprise. In all the visits to schools I have made over the past ten years, both in secondary and primary, I have never once witnessed this method of teaching, and I would be more than a little concerned if I had.

I wondered where the evidence lay for these rather extraordinary claims. Unlike David Hume, I am not of the view that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence - ordinary evidence would be quite sufficient, but even that is conspicuous by its absence. Instead, during the conference, we were treated to some anecdotes from the Association’s Education Office, along with the testimony of a mother and a teenage boy.¹

A rather different perspective is seen in another video on the same site. Under the title ‘What do Humanists believe about Religious and Moral Education’² a number of Humanists share their views. Amongst them is a Humanist mother who shares her experience of RE in a Catholic school, where pupils of all faiths and none are invited to share their perspectives. This bears witness to the good work being done in many schools - even in the faith schools that the Humanists wish to abolish.

Following a survey, the Scottish Humanists declared the finding that one in five parents were unaware of the right to withdraw their child from RE and Religious Observance as “worrying”.³ The same survey found that parents

‘want to see a more secular approach where children hear a variety of religious and non-religious viewpoints’. Clearly there is work to be done in order to inform parents and the Humanists alike of what is going on in RE classrooms.

If, as the Humanists assert, children are being coerced into participating in religious activities, this is unacceptable, and the matter should be raised with the school, and if that fails to produce the desired result, with the appropriate Education Authority. To suggest, however, that RE needs a root and branch reform on the basis of some allegations of poor practice is not acceptable.

There are many examples of anti-religious sentiments being expressed in the media - they are particularly prevalent in

comment sections on sites such as You Tube, where many young people will regularly be exposed to the most virulent and offensive language attacking religious people and beliefs. When A C Grayling responded to Baroness Warsi’s reference to ‘militant atheists’ earlier this year, he suggested that there was a categorical incompatibility in the term, comparing it to the absurdity of ‘sleeping furiously’. Perhaps Professor Grayling does not spend much time reading internet message board postings, but many young and impressionable people do, and it will be very clear to them that atheists can, indeed, be

militant. They can also exhibit qualities of intolerance, arrogance and ignorance.

Those who characterise people of faith as ‘religious believers’ - understanding religions not as multi-faceted systems of life and practice but as sets of propositions about the world to which the believer assents, following rules and orders unquestioningly in the interests of pursuing a life in the worship of a myth - misrepresent what it is to be a person of faith. To appreciate the richness and complexity of religions - the diversity within traditions as well as between traditions - takes time and effort and an openness to the lived experience of the faithful.

To reduce RE to a pick and mix overview of ‘beliefs’ from which children are free to choose the elements they like, is to do a disservice to the richness and complexity of humanity’s on-going search for truth, goodness, beauty, justice and peace.

When A C Grayling responded to Baroness Warsi’s reference to “militant atheists” earlier this year, he suggested that there was a categorical incompatibility in the term

¹ These contributions can be viewed on the internet at <http://vimeo.com/43529215>

² <http://vimeo.com/31247938>

³ http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk/content/education_research/

Buddhists, Fire and Rescue Service and Police WORKING TOGETHER IN CUMBRIA

The working relationship between Cumbria Constabulary, the Fire and Rescue Service and the Buddhist Group of Kendal (BGKT) has its roots in a meeting held in Kendal Fire Station in 2009. An unusual venue perhaps for a meeting of representatives from religious organisations and local agencies, but one that has proved significant to the on-going and rich exchange of ideas and fellowship between the participants.

Since that time the Community Room at Kendal Fire Station has become a regular venue for Buddhist gatherings including a retreat led by Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa, Head of Ketumati Buddhist Vihara Oldham for BGKT. It is believed that this may well be the first retreat led by a Buddhist Monk to take place in a Fire Station in the UK. He also gave a talk and led a valuable question and answer session for personnel of Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service. The meeting was chaired by Fire Officer Will Richardson (Service Delivery Manager Kendal Locality Office) and attended by Gloria Warwick BME & Migrant Workers Advocate Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service and members of BGKT.

Further inroads into community relations have been made by Ondy Willson from the Yeshe Tibetan Buddhist Group in Cumbria who also ran a successful training session based around

mindfulness for the Police at Police Headquarters, Kendal. Chief Constable of Cumbria Stuart Hyde is working with BGKT and interfaith forums to develop closer links with



religious organisations from all faiths. He led the Cumbria Interfaith Forum meeting in February 2012 and explained: "Cumbria is a diverse county, and our towns and villages include a number of different faiths in their make-up. It is important that we reach out to as many of these faith groups as possible, and understand the needs of the various cultures and groups that form part of our local communities, in order for us to build trust and confidence in policing and also to best meet the needs of the people we serve. I recently hosted an online interfaith webchat involving representatives from a range of faiths and beliefs as well as Constabulary staff and members of the public. A number of really interesting issues were discussed and I hope that some of the ideas from these conversations will be developed further in the near future".



Playing the character of St. John the Theologian in the Passion Play A Passion for Kendal was a moving experience for me. It is the first time the play has been performed in Kendal for 400 years, and possibly the first time a Christian Saint has been played by a Buddhist Nun. To mark the occasion Sister Mary Stella, of the Monastery of Our Lady of Hyning kindly created an Icon of St. John as a personal gift for me and explains the thought-provoking symbolism embodied within: St John the Theologian is known in the Gospel of John as the Beloved Disciple.

The Icon shows St John turning around and up to listen to God's Word, seen in the upper left hand corner: God is mysteriously present always. St John teaches us to listen with our inner ear and heart. The divine presence is seen as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

St John holds a scroll in his right hand: this is the inspired word of God that his disciple (not seen) is taking down as dictation. His left hand is open to the world, giving out what he has heard. The halo reminds us he is divinized by God's grace - and Gold is a symbol of the divine presence. St John sits with his feet on a platform bringing heaven and earth into greater oneness. The blueness of his cloak reminds us of the divine and St John transcribed the divine word: the rocks in the desert remind us it is the locus of God. The cave is of dark ignorance, losing one's way, despair etc.

St John sits in the true light and God uses him as a bearer of light. St John invites us to sit in God's presence.



Jacquetta Gomes Bodhicarini Upasika Jayasili
Secretary BGKT Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada)

The Passion Play was performed and directed by Kendal Community Theatre a secular organisation.
Photograph (top right): Jacquetta Gomes, FO Will Richardson and the Ven. Pidiville Piyatissa
Photograph (bottom right): Sr. Mary Stella with the Icon of St. John created in the workshop of the Monastery Our Lady of Hyning. For further details on the Monastery please see www.bernardine.org

“Truth is one, paths are many”

Sri Swami Satchidananda
1914-2002



Part of something MAGNIFICENT



If I were to try to describe the 'role' of religion in my life, I would not find it easy because my religion, *Sanatan Dharm*, more commonly known as Hinduism, is a way of life for me.

One of the most important elements of my faith is the sense of belonging it gives me: it brings comfort and support should things not go right, or even if they do! Being a Hindu also gives me a feeling of connectedness to my roots in India.

The stress of student life can become very heavy and it is at these times that it is hard to keep focus and concentrate on what needs to be done. It is these times where it is easy to be led astray from doing what is required, by many different things. Yet there is one thing that is proven to increase focus and reduce stress, meditation. I find meditation both relaxing, to calm down the uneasy mind and therefore provide a clearer picture of what is going on in certain situations, as well as an opportunity to take time out in the day and focus on Bhagwan or God. In the busy-ness of the modern world, the hectic schedules of university and demands of working life, there is at least one place in which I can find peace, in Bhagwan or God.

Hindu Dharm gives me a sense of direction. If ever I feel lost or confused in a particular situation and I'm not sure what I should do, I can always turn to my religion, which will guide me to follow the path of Dharm and Truth; to carry out one's duty with all that one can possibly give. I never sense that it is not there for me, no matter what happens; it will always be there, like a helping hand and guide. There hasn't been a moment where I have felt as though my religion has shunned me or looked down upon me for deeds I have done, but rather, helped me realise a mistake,

repent, learn from that mistake and move on.

For some people this may sound a little weird but for me it is the context in which I socialise. I regularly enjoy conversations on many different parts of religion, whether it is from stories of Gods or more philosophical aspects such as the Soul. Hindu Dharm has given me the opportunity to meet wonderful and inspiring people who not only have interesting things to say on religion itself but on personal and self development. I feel that I have learnt a lot from many scholars, as well as non-scholars, that I have met over the years. Joining prestigious organisations such as NHSF (the National Hindu Students Forum) has not only helped me to open up and build as a person but it gives me the inner satisfaction that I'm also helping to contribute back to society.

Practising Hindu Dharm makes me happy. Simply by studying different pictures of Goddesses and Gods puts my mind at ease and makes me smile. Their different postures and the elegantly drawn symbols prove that religion is not just something that gives you instructions on how to live your life, it also gives you visual pleasure. Art in many forms plays an important role in Hindu Dharm, and I cherish the variety of images that are created, not just those conveyed through paintings or

drawings, but the detailed stories that give rise to such vivid imagery.

Religion, for me, provides on so many different levels, not only does it give me happiness but it provides spiritual support, something I can turn to when confused; it helps me to socialise; it gives me an inner peace and a deep sense of belonging - and it fills me with the understanding that I am a part of something magnificent.

In the busy-ness of the modern world, the hectic schedules of university and demands of working life, there is at least one place in which I can find peace, in Bhagwan or God



Chamunda Maa



Nav Durga

FAITHFUL FOUNDATIONS

“Show me your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Guide me in Your truth and faithfulness and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; for You do I wait all the day long” — Psalm 25:4-5

We all appreciate a good guide. When we are lost, confused or stray off the path we initially intend to take, we often need a guiding force to usher us back on track. In the Christian faith I believe that I have that guide. For me, it is all the more exciting as I realise that this guide is with me all the time. In Christ, I have a saviour who loves me unconditionally and cares about all that concerns me compassionately. The Bible is the guide on how I should conduct my life. It is the basis for my faith and indeed my life. In writing this article I hope to reflect on just why this is the case.

The Christian faith is the bedrock of my life. It is the firm foundation upon which the rest of my life can safely be constructed. Therefore, in a daily sense, faith is omnipresent. It is subtly present in all the little activities I undertake throughout the course of the day, from a quick prayer before breakfast, to the faith I place in God to see me through an exam. There are also more sporadic moments when I am grateful to God for the indescribable beauty that is inherently displayed in nature, or during the seemingly serendipitous event of meeting and sharing a connection with a ‘stranger’ for example. I think that once one realises just how fortunate he is to have God by his side then the level of enjoyment and fulfilment he feels each day can grow exponentially.

I look to devote a certain amount of time to God each morning. I pray for God’s blessings on my family, friends and the less-privileged. I ask for his grace to strengthen my faith and life. I find this practice remarkably rejuvenating and inspiring. On a Sunday, I worship God with other Christians at my local Church where the style of worship is of a more intimate, conservative ilk. The intimate communality of our communication with God in Church reflects an aspect of the faith itself. In my opinion, a core objective of Christianity lies in the development of a personal relationship with God. The way to nurture this relationship is to live as He taught us, and to communicate with Him as we would our own family and confidant.

My faith is nourished each time I read a biblical passage, consider its message and meditate on its lessons. I feel this equips me with my *costume d’armure* for the day. It provides me with the proverbial shield which protects me from the various challenges of the moment and arms me with the motivation I require to seize the day. I draw a sense of comfort and confidence from the realisation that God cannot take me to what he cannot take me through. This realisation prevents me from refraining from partaking in activities out of diffidence. It gives me the courage to defend my views and to face my fears. It influences the way I think, the way I act and the way I live.

I believe that being a person of faith has instilled within me Christian principles such as compassion and stewardship, which lead me to actively contribute to the society in which I live. As I grow older, these principles make me aspire to positively influence those outside my own local community, wherever I can, for the sake of justice and to the benefit of those who are less able to speak for themselves.

That said there are, as one might expect, many challenges that I, like Christians of many generations, both present and past, must face each day. I partake in heated debates with those who strongly oppose the basic notion of faith on a daily basis. People are of course welcome to their own opinion. However, perhaps more worryingly, it seems to me that in the ultra-consumerist society in which we currently find ourselves, self-gratification often takes precedence over communal values and principled fulfilment. People appear to disagree with Christian ideals simply because they are unwilling to

curb their individualistic lifestyles to accommodate the less ‘glamorous’ aspects of a Christian life of service. I am certainly not exempt from this generalisation. However I think that the greatest challenges for the modern day Christian are to stand up for what he believes with integrity and sensitivity to other people’s beliefs; to run his Christian race faithfully and to learn to look at life from a fundamentally different perspective to that of the increasingly secular society around him.

*God cannot
take me to what
he cannot take
me through*



“FREEDOM FROM...”

faith as a liberating experience

They say there are two things you should never discuss with the English, religion and politics. For the politically orientated like myself, the latter is a minor inconvenience mainly preventing discourse of a topic I believe is a vital cog in civil society. For people of faith a similar barrier exists in expressing much of what they feel to be sacred.

Yet for many the relegation of religion into the sphere of private contemplation and practice is welcomed. It is as if religion is only what is done in seclusion and anything that exists within the public space must be free of its mention or practice so as not to cause any potential moral hazard.

As a Muslim this can cause no end of difficulties. Muslims are keen to point out how the religion of Islam, which they attempt to practice, is not a religion as understood in the contemporary sense but literally “a way of life”. Faith for a Muslim is not easily divorced from practice and every act, be it in the private or public space, must carry an element of divine or spiritual instruction or intention.

Islam knows no concept of monkhood and anything practised in the confines of mosques, homes or caves for that matter must likewise be brought out in everyday interaction. This is where a plethora of problems arise for Muslims including myself in the context of multicultural Britain.

In terms of Islam as an active agent in my daily life the religion acts somewhat as a mirror: the sources both the Qur’an and Hadith (detailing Prophetic practise and characteristics) are the standard unto which one measures one’s own actions, especially in dealings with family, friends and general society. **Often the choice is not between what is right and wrong but simply of higher ethics and the best way of carrying out any given activity.** For Muslims the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) exists as the exemplar par excellence and one strives to follow his way of life even in those everyday acts that are considered mundane.

Living in a liberal democracy the ‘live and let live attitude’ allows for one to put into practice Qur’anic edicts and Prophetic traditions. This means that as a Muslim I am free to observe the five daily prayers that are a daily obligation for every Muslim. This daily routine allows for a detachment from the increasingly fast paced world and the opportunity to cultivate a relationship with a higher entity.

Yet the standards dictated by an obsessive media and advertising industry, which encourages and normalises the consumption and partaking in vices that are an affront to many Islamic teachings, can cause a dilemma.

For me personally a choice is always to be made between the drugs, sex and rock and roll culture that has been sold to the youth of my era and the Islamic teachings of self discipline and conservation of mind and soul. Often this can mean missing out on social occasions and lacking interest in the new mass trend. By sacrificing the proverbial joys of youth one can also be seen as somewhat strange and detached from reality, holding onto pre modern ideas that belong to ages long gone by.

the idea of freedom peddled in the West is one resting upon the idiom of “freedom to”, Islam has the opposite position that says that man’s true liberation comes in the form of “freedom from”.

As a Muslim I often feel that not only is my practice different to many of those around me but also my perception of reality and even time. As I write this I am existing in the month of July in the year 2012 AD. Yet I am also practising my faith by observing the fast of the month of Ramadan in the year 1433 AH. 2012 has the unrelenting demands of working long hours to accumulate wealth just to keep a decent standard of living. 1433 on the other hand demands only the following of

God’s command of observing the etiquettes of a sacred month, just as it was done in 1 AH. To live up to the demands of one reality in the midst of another can be at best difficult and at worst contradictory.

The comforting fact for me has always been the idea that as a Muslim attempting to live up to the ideals of my religion I am still part of something organic that can be traced back to a great age of faith and prophetic practice. This opposed to the modern age where detachment from the past is the norm, an almost nomadic existence bereft of tradition and any sacred elixir.

Put simply the idea of freedom peddled in the West is one resting upon the idiom of “freedom to”, Islam has the opposite position that says that man’s true liberation comes in the form of “freedom from”. Freedom from the lower base desires of greed, ego and lust which can immerse one into the rat race of life forgetting the higher ideals of worship which Islamic teachings emphasise as man’s primary purpose. In following my faith upon such principles I believe Islam allows me to express my true freedom. In doing so my faith allows me to be truly human.

The Magic-Weaving Business

by Sir John Jones

Pub. Learnta Publishers, London 2011

Many of us look back over our school days and sometimes, through rose tinted glasses, remember them fondly. Many of the older generation can be heard telling young people “those were the days”. But were things so different then, or is it that “teacher bashing” has become a symptom of our culture? If today’s press is to be believed, many of the ills of our society can be firmly laid at the feet of teachers. We also have Ofsted and its constant measurement and comparison, not only in pupils’ exam results but also in the slotting of teachers into a four point scale. Is it any wonder that teachers can be left floundering and wondering why they chose their career?

The book *The Magic Weaving Business*, by Sir John Jones, reminds us all why they do it, at times making the reader laugh out loud and, at others, surreptitiously wipe away a tear. We know that teachers can have a huge impact on our lives, for better or for worse and often the consequences remain with us for a lifetime. Sir John asks us to reflect upon three people who have influenced us positively - take some time to reflect on your list now and there is a high probability that there will be a teacher in there somewhere.

The book examines this impact and the qualities of the teachers that we remember as making a positive difference to our lives. Sir John describes these teachers as the “magic weavers”.

The book sets out on a mission to discover and explain that magic. What does it look like? Why do some teachers have the magic and others do not? Amongst the teachers we remember, what made the magic weavers special? Do they have some common characteristics? Can we learn from them and replicate their skills; can we weave our own magic?

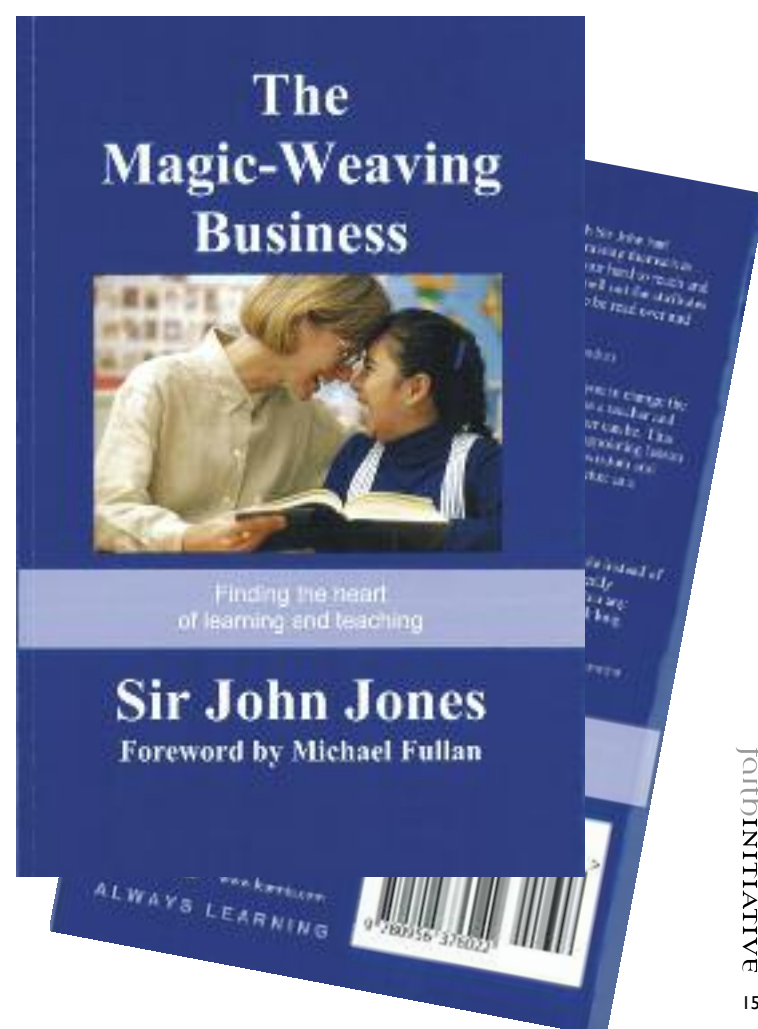
Sir John is something of a magic weaver himself! I have had the privilege of listening to him in a ‘twilight’ training session. The sessions you dread, which come at the end of a long and tiring day, when all you really want to do, is go home! I spent the whole hour, absolutely entranced by his description of his career and laughed until my sides hurt. I was quite disappointed when he finished his talk and was certainly uplifted and looking forward to working with children again the next day.

The book is full of stories and anecdotes Sir John has gathered from working with teachers and young people from all over the world. He does not attempt to take credit for them, merely pointing out that he has been privileged to have the opportunity to work with magic weavers. As a result of this work he has used his time to “collate and categorise nuggets of good learning”. The knowledge gained has enabled him to pull together a range of

strategies and ideas that work. The book then focuses on the analysis of these strategies and ideas, so that if unpicked we might all begin to understand and try to reproduce some of them in our daily lives.

As a teacher, and as a parent, the most powerful message I get from the book is that children may forget what teachers made them learn, but they will never forget how they made them feel. We can all remember the bright shining eyes of children looking up at us, eager to please and desperate to make us happy. How easy it is to destroy that desire with one thoughtless comment, dismissive look or worse still total disinterest.

The book explores why teachers do their jobs. Sir John categorises them into three groups: those that see it as a job, ‘they turned up, put in the time, earned their money and returned home’. The second group see teaching as a career: ‘they are ambitious, keen to do well, impress and progress’. The third group describe it as a calling: ‘they want to make a difference, love the job and are passionate about it, in other words they are emotionally attached to it’. I will leave you to judge which category the ‘magic weavers’ fall into.



In the chapter entitled 'Understanding the magic' Sir John provides a diagram which represents the collated views of colleagues when talking about magic weavers. The model entitled 'The Calling' intertwines passion, wisdom and what Sir John calls righteous indignation: 'A burning, simmering sense of frustration, anger even, at the injustice and unfairness of life'. Magic weavers are those who believe in all children and will try unflinchingly to help them overcome the barriers and challenges that face them.

He then adds another combination of behaviours, linking what teachers believe and value, what they say and what they do, something which he calls synchronicity. Children are very emotionally intelligent; they don't have the wool pulled over their eyes easily. They know when a teacher is saying the right thing but doesn't really mean it. How often as a parent do you hear your child saying he/she just doesn't like me and although you try to disagree and encourage them, you can feel it yourself when you go to parents evening, a gut instinct that something just isn't quite right. The eyes tell it all! Magic weavers appear to get this synchronicity right, children know when the teacher says something they really mean it and if necessary, will act upon their words. Even if the children do not agree with the teacher they trust them. Receiving the trust of a child is a huge gift, a privilege and we should cherish it; once it slips through our fingers due to a lapse in concentration or other distractions it is very difficult to get back.

Sir John goes on to investigate the factors which may influence success in life. A whole chapter is dedicated to self-belief; 'Whether you think you can or you can't you are probably right'.

He goes on to describe how our experiences from the minute we come into the world are filtered through our senses into our conscious minds, and how from all of this information we form our attitudes, values and beliefs – forming what Benjamin Zander calls "the voice in your head". The book then looks into how that voice can be influenced and who influences it. Parents and teachers take note!

What follows is a somewhat uncomfortable self-analysis of parenting skills. How difficult it is to stand back and allow your children to make mistakes; to take a good hard look at whether you allow your children to make their own choices, or whether you push them into what you think they should do.

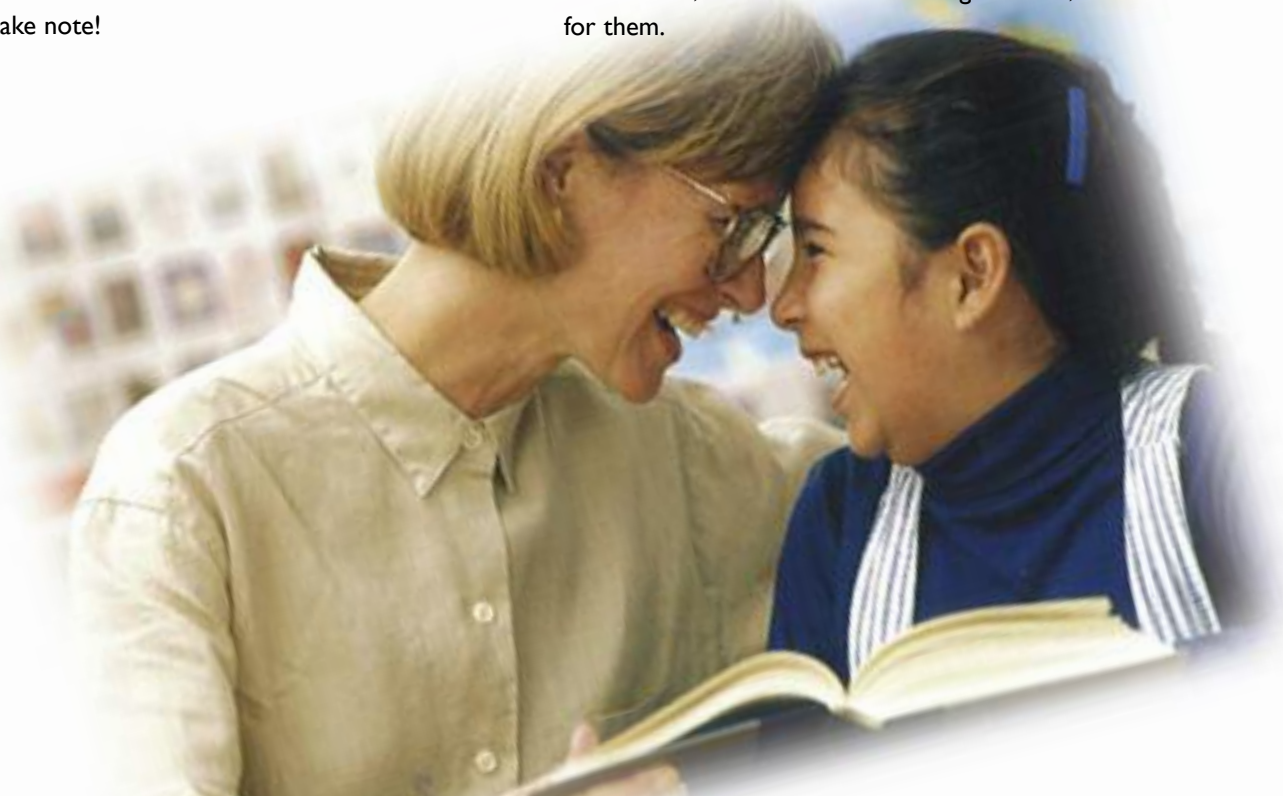
The script used by 'the voice in your head' is formed by all the people who interact with the children. The power of that script or the long term influence of it, should never be underestimated.

Sir John then analyses the things that magic weavers say and suggests some phrases that we can all use to imitate; hopefully they will become part of our daily routines. They are small, sometimes appearing inconsequential tweaks but the power they have in forming a positive script, cannot be denied.

After a journey of discovery, self-reflection and humour Sir John sums up the role of the 'Magic Weaver' in a chapter aptly called 'To serve them all my days':

- The ability to win from young people their permission to take them to places where they cannot go alone.
- To see beyond the sometimes ugly reality of their drab little cage.
- To be the keeper of their dreams.
- To know where they are, yet always see what they could be.

This is a book I pick up and read over and over again, finding something new every time. It brings together everything we would want for our children, as a parent and a teacher – focus, hope and challenge. But above all, it reminds us that their ability to live a happy and fulfilling life is paramount and that we should endeavour to give them the right tools in their toolbox to achieve that, because much as we might like to, we cannot do it for them.



the Super Moon

5TH MAY 2012

All day she kept the moon close about her
Savouring the nectar she'd taste as soon
As it rose, ripe in the still light sky,
Flexing already to the hum it would strike
In the plain chant she'd made her own.

She kept that moon as close as her name,
Knowing the opaque rain would drain
The clouds in time; rolled new words
From NASA round her tongue, practised
Understanding perigee and elipse

How they mated to make the greatest moon
Of the year, half believed that if it appeared
Behind Beata Maria's tower its bloom
Would seem greater then in a naked sky,
Never doubted, if she held a wet finger

High, the moon would dry it. All night, her moon
Eluded her, locked behind a drizzle that held
No romance. Hope fell through her hands
And she didn't see the crescents shining
In her nails, the apricot warmth in her widening eyes.



A Ceremony of Light: LONDON 2012

'I had a feeling that we were witnessing sacred rites being performed in an open-air cathedral.'

Those words could easily have been written by someone witnessing Danny Boyle's almost universally-acclaimed opening ceremony for London 2012.

In fact they came from the pen of Sir Roger Bannister, the first four-minute miler, when he reflected on the London 1948 Olympics in his autobiography written in 1955.

The context for London and for the Union of Nations, of which it is the premier capital city, has changed a very great deal, of course. Of the cheering crowds with their flags in 1948 Bannister could write: *'They had all survived six hard years of war and here, at last, was an opportunity to celebrate not just Britain's victory over the Nazis, but also Britain's survival'*. The combination of ritual narrating an international story - the hope for world peace being uppermost no doubt in the first games after the

Second World War - as well as expressing a sense of how Britain sees itself, remains a constant between 1948 and 2012.

In 1948 there was a combination of the best of Britain's ceremonial tradition - state trumpeters and military marching bands on the one hand; scarlet tunics shimmering on that hottest of days; with the blonde, almost classical effeminacy of John Mark who lit the cauldron and evoked for those assembled in Wembley Stadium an image of the birth of the Olympics in Ancient Greece itself. A feeling too - with the biggest cheer coming for Polish and USA teams (Germany and Japan were not invited) - of comrades in arms celebrating the ultimate victory of justice, and sealing in sport the new world order that the emerging United Nations would construct the same year in Methodist Central Hall.



From the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 certain givens have begun to cluster round the lighting of the cauldron - a symbol in ancient Greece of the truce between island states that was to last throughout the Olympic Games. The procession of the Olympic flag; the playing of the Olympic anthem; the swearing of oaths by competitors, then later judges and now even coaches. All these are givens.

Like any piece of liturgy - thinking back to Bannister's apt allusion to a cathedral - such a ceremony has its symbolic markers. In the case of the Olympics they emphasise peace and no one who saw the fusion of those petals - one for each of the 203 participating nations - will surely ever forget the way Thomas Heatherwick's cauldron expressed as never before that necessary fusion of light from which peace and hope are constructed.

The fact that potential future Olympic athletes were chosen to light it by Britain's most distinguished Olympians deepened an already poignant moment.

But symbol needs preparation. In the Christian Eucharist, which climaxes in the sharing of bread and wine, it is story-telling - the retelling of the narrative of cross and resurrection - that announces the symbols. Something similar happens in a Passover Supper.

Processions are a key preparatory part of most cultic traditions. And for all its length nothing beats the procession of athletes which leads to the cauldron climax.

This takes us back to that most ancient of religious traditions - the community camping around the fire, telling its stories that embrace and transcend its diversity to ensure that future generations know them, appropriate them, and live into them.

But whereas the fire in the Christian Easter liturgy for example is kindled before the first flame of resurrection is carried into the church, in the form of a candle, the community then sitting around this Pascal flame to retell its stories, to enter into them indeed - an Olympic Games has a two-fold dynamic - also present in many a religious tradition - of how you turn guests into hosts.

The universal is therefore approached through the particular - in the case of London 2012 the narrative of the host nation.

This has to be done very subtly if it is to work however. Hosts have to become guests at their own games: guests have to become hosts to the

Olympic spirit and ideal. The particularity of the host nation's narrative cannot be too narrow as to exclude, but it must be particular enough so as to express a story that is concrete and rooted in a national narrative, if others are to find a way to see the connection with their own narratives and the overarching narrative that may unite us all.

Boyle put the strands of this narrative together in a way that was utterly convincing, gripping and multi-layered.

A bell - the traditional means to mark time; to proclaim especially significant moments; to call people to prayer, and to ring in great celebrations - which had been specially made, initiated what took place in the Olympic cathedral. As in any great piece of liturgy, story was uppermost and Boyle set himself the challenge of expressing something of what I

think we would call the modern and post-modern British story. This was initiated by vocal 'markers' of the four nations of the union - two clearly religious and two of folk origin. What followed depicted the English rural idyll, *Green and pleasant land*, as Boyle entitled it and expressed the 'myth' of Jerusalem - using myth in its proper sense as guiding narrative to be lived into and realised. This was then subverted by one of the great moments in world history, Darby's use of coal to smelt iron in 1709 which inaugurated the industrial revolution.

Thomas Heatherwick's
cauldron expressed as
never before that
necessary fusion of light
from which peace and
hope are constructed

Cauldron at closing ceremony:
photograph by Matthew Wells



Whilst some may question why Boyle chose not to evoke much of what lay prior to his post-industrial focus, he skilfully showed nonetheless that this period both was, and was not, progress for humanity. In many ways *Pandemonium*, as he titled this section acknowledging Milton's invention of the word in *Paradise Lost* for the city of hell, was an evocation of the enormous good - and the power to people (Chartists, suffragettes and trade unionists among them) - that the revolution unleashed. *Ex terra Lucem: Out of the ground came light* as the motto of Lancashire's St Helen's runs. And a molten river of light formed the Olympic rings that lifted above the performers to show that what might yet re-emerge, from an inexorable post-Enlightenment narrative of progress, is the ancient hope for peace. This vision both looking forward to the cauldron and beyond it did not however disguise the pain and suffering that also flowed from the industrial revolution: the exploitation of workers in Britain and elsewhere. The fact that swords were not beaten into ploughshares nor spears into pruning hooks at the behest of industrialisation, but rather the skills and insights acquired were used to amass a destructiveness unleashed in Two World Wars, was also not glossed over. Boyle was even-handed in this sense and allowed for praise and penitence in equal measure. He also allowed for poignant moments of remembrance - both of the World Wars of the twentieth century and of 7/7 in the twenty-first, the latter of course happening the day after the success of the Olympic bid was announced in 2005 and evoking the remembrance of victims through the hymn *Abide with me*.

A section emphasising children's literature and the National Health Service seemed to baffle many commentators. Most had failed to remember that the NHS came into being the year the Olympics were last held in London. They appeared distracted instead by the seeming tenuousness of the connection of JM Barrie and Great Ormond Street Hospital - Barrie of course gave the rights to his blockbuster *Peter Pan* to support the hospital's work. But the connection was pretty obvious. Boyle was not only emphasising the corporate vision that created the desire for, and reality of, a National Health Service for all but specifically that healthiness of body, mind and imagination - not least for young people - which is a key part of the vision for the legacy of London 2012.

Standing the other side of this section and paralleling the previous section focused on the industrial revolution, British popular music - recognised pretty universally as a language of quality that transcends cultures - heralded a celebration of the communication revolution brought about by the invention of the world-wide-web by Sir Tim Berners-Lee. This of course

emphasised the possibilities for human connectivity.

Boyle's ceremony could be seen at times as liturgy - it had all the elements, text and context, suffering and glory, sin and absolution as something new is inaugurated. His was an avowedly multi-layered story within which the best and worst of human experience would find resonance. But equally - and Boyle's references to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* gave this away - it was like the court masques of sixteenth and seventeenth century English life, which brought disparate elements together

Boyle's ceremony could be seen at times as liturgy - it had all the elements, text and context, suffering and glory, sin and absolution as something new is inaugurated

both tragic and comic, and used song and dance to create a narrative that was teleological but not so directional as to exclude spectators from becoming participants. The best liturgy does this of course as it gives space for recreation and redemption of persons within community - but rarely as well as Boyle, in my experience. For those with eyes and ears to see and listen, Boyle was offering help to religious traditions some of whom in contemporary terms specialise in spectacle that is neither

multi-layered nor transforming, nor as symbolically rich as was this Ceremony in the Olympic cathedral that spoke so powerfully across what is mistakenly supposed to be the sacred-secular divide.

Crucially humour - with star turns from Her Majesty The Queen and Mr Bean - enabled people to make the transition from spectator to participant. Not with that forced chumminess which is the speciality of the comedy-turn vicar who is rarely of course funny at all - though seems to pop up in churches everywhere these days. But in a way that subverted the narrative to make us all less self-conscious in our inhabiting of it.

These moments were master strokes as was the cycling doves that raced around the stadium to make the final transition to the cultic moments around the flame.

Indeed, so rich and layered was the experience that turning it into words is of only limited value. '*The word made flesh made word again*' as the poet Edwin Muir put it. The ceremony was about Britain and the world and the way we have enriched life globally, and also created some of its most long-lasting problems. Boyle didn't focus on them but he didn't hide them either. It was about the *Windrush* world that has come and so enriched Britain - and how the Games themselves showed our delight in a Farah as much as an Ennis. But like all the best drama and liturgy it was much more than even the sum of its parts. It was a mirror, yes, held up to Britons and held up to the world. It was a way of seeing reality as it is and as we long it to be. But it was - dare I say it - also sacramental, the setting out of a vision which together, across all that sometimes threatens to divide us in the world, culturally, socially, politically, and in religious terms, we found ourselves beginning to fulfil.

SAFEGUARDING *the Fragile*

If you watched the opening ceremony of Paralympics 2012, you will have witnessed the celebration of fragile humanity at its most beautiful, moving, inspirational and robust. Sadly there is an ugly side of humanity too where fragility is exploited and dehumanised. I am referring in particular to the brutality inflicted on young girls by gangs of men in Rochdale that recently made media headlines and sent shock waves across UK. These crimes were especially appalling for the following reasons:

- 1 the girls were underage; from care homes; and vulnerable
- 2 the nature of the deliberate and ruthless abuse inflicted over a long period of time
- 3 the perpetrators were all [but one] Pakistani men and their victims were white girls and therefore the implication of race and what this might do to aggravate race relations when English Defence League (EDL) and British National Party (BNP) continually stoke the anti 'non-White' and anti-Muslim fire
- 4 they exposed once again the failure of Social Services and the cracks in Area Child Protection Procedures
- 5 this was a gang crime occurring in more than one British town and reported simultaneously – making us fear that a pattern was emerging.

Children who live in a loving and caring environment are the fortunate ones and those who are not are at risk of neglect as well as different kinds of abuse. The girls as young as 13 and 15, groomed and exploited by the organised gang of Pakistani men, were just children; the men were old enough to be their fathers. One must respond to this exploitation in the appropriate way and not just react today with hysteria and forget tomorrow. We need to take a deep breath and ask ourselves, in the absence of parents and proper guardians who is responsible for 'policing' street childhood from opportunist predators. Why did these unfortunate girls not have adequate support from the menacing influences of street nightlife? The horror of their experience will haunt the girls for a long time to come and so while these men languish in prison, it will never be the right punishment. Sexual exploitation of children is a heinous crime and from my faith perspective, it is a heinous sin. Islam teaches us to protect children and keep them from harm; show them compassion; cherish them; and to raise them in modesty for purposes of decency and personal protection. Orphans have a special place in Islam too. In eight different verses of The Qur'an God instructs fair treatment of orphans; recommends shelter and help to them when necessary; condemns harsh behaviour and cruelty to them and commands safeguarding their inheritance and property. In reality, children from care homes or broken homes are in need of protection much like the orphans.



Sexual grooming is Forbidden (haraam) in Islam. It is Not Permissible under any circumstances and God's wrath will be upon the perpetrators of such crimes. Islam also forbids 'zina' or sex outside marriage. The Qur'an tackles the issue of 'zina' in several places and calls it an outrage and evil and if the evidence against it is solid / witnesses are produced (as indeed it is not easy to produce witness for what happens between consenting adults behind closed doors) then the prescribed punishment in Islam is flogging. What these perverted men did to the unfortunate girls was systematic rape in captivity. There is also a relevant Hadith to explain the prohibition. The Noble Prophet's (peace and blessings be on him) sayings and teachings collectively are the Hadith. Once a man came to him and asked his permission to have sex [outside marriage] with other women. The Noble Prophet put it to the questioner: "Would you like it if other men commit such acts with your Mother, Sister, Wife, or Daughter?" The Man said "No". The Noble Prophet replied, "Well then why do you want to commit such vile acts which you hate for your own women folk?" After giving the man appropriate guidance the Noble Prophet prayed for the protection of this man's soul from evil thoughts and deeds.

Religion aside, then there is also the question of 'race'. In a

multi-cultural society, the race element is oftentimes unavoidable, and at other times irrelevant. Here I think it is unavoidable. As far as external identification goes, the perpetrators were all from Pakistani background, save one who was from Afghanistan, and all from a Muslim family background: the victims were all 'white' English girls. Many people will perceive this, especially those who are prejudiced, as a race issue, despite the fact that white men are also groomers and that none of the Asian gang members had any respect for the Islamic way of life, its principles or its culture. Following my e-campaign to raise awareness in the community about the grooming cases I was asked at a BBC Radio 4 interview if grooming was a race issue and if there was any significance of the 9 convicted Rochdale men being from the same culture; and was sexual repression one of the conditions for which these men sought an outlet. So was it race or sheer debauchery?

- If race was an issue here, it is not a black and white issue.
- These Asian men were degenerate people and hardened criminals, as indeed all sexual predators are. Sexual exploitation and the age-old industry of prostitution take place in Pakistan and elsewhere in the world where the victims are from within their own community. There are paedophiles from within the English community. Race in both instances do not play any part.
- The accessibility of these white girls was a main factor and so indirectly, race has relevance. The British Asian community is a close-knit community with familiar social networks, and where parental control is strong, and locally families generally know, or know of, each other. Street nightlife for girls and women are commonly alien or redundant to their way of socialising. To prey on Pakistani or other Asian girls then would have been more difficult.
- As for sexual repression being put forward as one of the conditions for the crime: men who do not believe in sexual morality can easily pay for sex with a consenting adult when a sex industry operates, in some form, in every town. Men (like women) from especially rural backgrounds such as the ones in question usually marry young and there is the advantage in Asian culture of finding a partner by arrangement through formal and informal structures. The men involved had no excuse for doing what they did. The Islamic guidance is clear: 'get married or practise self restraint until you are able to marry'.

We cannot single out a particular ethnicity or a community group as the offender and statistics will not allow it either. However, as Muslims we cannot ignore that this monstrous crime is happening at our doorstep and it is our duty to do our part as responsible adults. We cannot look the other way by

The Noble Prophet put it to the questioner: "Would you like it if other men commit such acts with your Mother, Sister, Wife, or Daughter?" The Man said "No". The Noble Prophet replied, "Well then why do you want to commit such vile acts which you hate for your own women folk?"

thinking this happens in other communities. Muslim leadership in the UK must demonstrate that it has evolved enough to delve into tricky terrain. The Islamic commandment is very clear. The Qur'an states: "Be a community that calls for what is good, urges what is right, and forbids what is wrong." (3:104); "You who

believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives." (4:135); "Be good to your parents, to relatives, to orphans, to the needy, to neighbours near and far, to travellers in need, and to your slaves" (4:36); "Say [Prophet], 'My Lord only forbids disgraceful deeds – whether they be open or hidden ...' (7:33) and "Stay well away from committing obscenities, whether openly or in secret" (6:151).

On a community level, how can we address the issue of criminal gangs taking

advantage of vulnerable girls?

- Community Leaders can raise awareness through word of mouth.
- Tell the matriarchs in their neighbourhood. Discuss it in women's groups – we must not forget many of these men were middle aged and most probably husbands and fathers.
- Discuss it in youth groups. Explain the Islamic guidance.
- Mosques need to be pro-active and include it in Friday sermon – discuss it in study circles, take a stand by openly condemning it.
- Involve women in Mosque management committee and benefit from their wisdom.
- Not advocating vigilantism, but community leaders can setup their own 'neighbourhood watch'. Suspicion may be aroused from the life style of men, in which case, the police should be alerted.
- Other faith communities can roll out culturally appropriate community initiatives to reach out to the fragile members of their community and keep them from harm. If each faith community took the initiative, with small steps they could play a big part to tackle the evil.

Whether in a personal, social or professional capacity, children generally feature in our lives. Safeguarding children should be a societal priority and it should heavily weigh upon our collective consciousness. Social Services in the UK do not get it right all the time resulting in 'duty of care' being tragically compromised. Lessons learned from vigorous reviews of cases that have failed needs to go hand in hand with effective strategic and operational safeguarding measures. **Safeguarding as a partnership responsibility across the local authorities and relevant establishments including faith establishments is worthy of consideration. This is a viable proposition that could reach its full potential by building on existing frameworks. What is needed is a visible leadership to tackle the issue and promote welfare of children.**

Children of the Woods

All is quieter now. I hear the wind as it gently caresses the leaves on the beautiful trees - ash, oak, beech, birch, hazel... As I look upwards the leaves move against the blue of the sky. I wait, watching as the children start to shift and stir. They have taken time in the shelters that they built together: reflecting, spellbound by their creations. Now they circulate, admiring each others constructions, talking about their different designs. They have all worked together in their groups without adult intervention. I am here when they need me. The children are at a Forest School in their local wood on the Isle of Arran.

Forest school is an inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self esteem through hands on learning experiences in a local woodland setting

(FEI Forest School Scotland; 2008)

The idea of Forest School developed from Sweden and is now an integral part of Denmark's pre-school programme. These countries have a reputation for the confidence and self-esteem they nurture in their children. A number of Nature Nurseries have been running successfully and achieving notice and respect from many other countries around the world. Bridgewater College, in England, conducted studies in Denmark in the mid 1990s which was the impetus for Forest School in the UK.

Organised and run by qualified leaders the School provides a low pupil/adult ratio thus allowing children to take on challenging activities, handling responsibility, and understanding the consequences of actions.

Respect for the individuality of children and young people is of central importance to the ethos of the Forest School. It has shown great results as a behavioural support programme, giving children the space and nurture of nature to experience success in their local environments, and build the confidence and skills to allow them to access learning in a classroom setting. We now understand that this programme not only offers value to

children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, but mainstream and various needs alike.

Children have a wondrous capacity to incite, test and maintain a strong desire to know and learn about the world around them. By focusing more on the process of learning rather than what is being learned true Forest School practice is best when unplanned, unexpected and unlimited thereby allowing for spontaneity, surprise and boundless learning experiences to take place. The children are encouraged to direct their own learning with the School leader promoting interest in outdoor play and supporting the children's learning, but most often stepping back to observe how the children react in this environment. These developments support the growth of self-

esteem and self-confidence in our children and help them develop the values, attitudes and skills required to appreciate and care for their natural environment and heritage. On this foundation higher order learning opportunities, such as recognising detail, questioning and investigation, can be built.

The woodlands are of the greatest importance to this dynamic approach to learning. Learning outdoors in the same local woodland setting throughout the seasons motivates the children and they become receptive to the natural passage of

time within a constantly changing outdoor environment that has an endless source of sounds, smells, tastes, textures and visual stimuli.

Woodlands are rich resources that speak from the past, capturing mankind's cultural, spiritual and mythological relationship with trees throughout the centuries which at the same time inspire and energize us in the present.



*Children have a
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The Sacred life of Trees

Judaism, Christianity and Islam all share a similar story which emphasises the importance of trees to each of these great faiths. The version of the story depends upon certain core beliefs, but the Jewish version goes like this:


*If one day you are planting a tree
and someone comes running to you
shouting that the Messiah has come,
first finish planting the tree, then go
and see if this is true.*

Every major faith has its stories about the central role of trees, from Yggdrasil, the Norse Tree at the Centre of the Universe, through the trees in the Garden of Eden, and the tree of the Cross to the Bodhi tree under which Prince Siddhartha achieved enlightenment and became the Buddha.

In Islam, a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad says that to plant a tree is an act of zakat – charity – because under its branches birds, animals, insects and human beings can live and thrive.

In Buddhist thought and teaching (based particularly on the Lotus Sutra) the Buddha can take any form to bring about the release of any aspect of nature from suffering – including taking the shape of a tree. Based upon this and in response to the indiscriminate and usually illegal felling of the forests of Cambodia and Thailand, Buddhist monks working in partnership with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), have ordained trees as monks. Wrapped in robes they are of course totally protected and thus the forest within which they stand becomes a sacred and protected area.

The role of faiths with regard to trees is not just mythology and stories. About 5% of the world's commercial forests are owned by faiths as a means of earning income. For example, the Church of Sweden owns around 12% of the commercial forests



A schoolboy at the Ebukoolo Primary School in Emuhaya, Kenya, holds a tree seedling; faith groups in Africa are launching major environmental education plans, including developing school orchards and gardens, as part of their long-term plans on the environment which will be launched in September 2012 at ARC's Nairobi celebration.



Above: In 2010, a group of Buddhist monks in northwest Cambodia won the UNDP-sponsored Equator Prize celebrating outstanding community efforts to conserve biodiversity. The monks patrol 18,000 hectares of community forest, ordaining trees to protect them from illegal logging.

Right: Children plant trees before being confirmed into the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania. Christian, Muslim and Hindu faith groups intend to plant millions of trees across Africa as part of their long-term plans on the environment, due to be launched in September 2012 at ARC's Nairobi celebration.



of Sweden, while the Benedictines in Austria own 28% of commercial forests. About 15% of the world's forests are considered sacred and although the faiths may not own them – for example the sacred forests of the Daoists in China are owned less than 1% by the Daoists themselves – the penumbra of sacredness offers a protection that no national or international law can ever manage.

In other words, around 20% of the world's forests have a direct relationship with faith. This is why the Jinja Honcho (Association of Shinto Shrines of Japan) in partnership with ARC, WWF and other organisations are working on a Religious Forestry Sites programme, developing appropriate forest management for these vital ecological sites. The need to protect and to restore forests is crucial as they not only provide the habitat for most of the species on the planet, absorb CO₂, provide resources for often the poorest communities to create a livelihood – but they are also beautiful.

Religious or sacred forests are amongst the most significant ecological sites in the world. In Lebanon, the Holy Forest of Harissa on the coast is one of only a handful of traditional Mediterranean oak forests left anywhere on the Mediterranean.

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Protected for centuries because it surrounds the statue of Our Lady of Lebanon and thus revered and owned by the Maronite Church, this was declared a Maronite Protected Environment in 1999. In Japan, the sacred forest of Ise surrounds the most important shrine in Japan. Here every twenty five years the shrine is rebuilt in wood to ensure the next generation knows

how to build in wood. The trees that are used were planted 250 years ago and the ones which will be needed in 250 years time are being planted now. This is the oldest recorded example of sustainable forestry with records going back to 4 BC.

In a world where trees are now largely valued as carbon sinks or for their economic value, the importance of a religious and spiritual understanding is crucial. Without it we reduce the trees to nothing more than objects of usefulness. Perhaps it is time that through the faiths we recapture our intimate relationship with trees. It is not without significance that when C.S. Lewis, author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, wanted to show how *The Last Battle* against evil would be won, it was because the trees entered into the battle, and through their strength the battle was won.

OF From SHORE to SHORE AN ANGLO-MOROCCAN ENCOUNTER

How do you create spaces in which young people from two countries, who don't share a language, can have a dialogue that sings? REEP's *Shore to Shore* project, linking England and Morocco, has taken the traditional route of the arts but with a difference. Standing four-square in Marrakesh, London, the small coastal town of Essaouira and Warwick, the project invites young people to become involved in Drama, Music, Cookery, Dance – and Photography. All the senses are engaged, so the conversation can go beyond words.

Just another intercultural arts project, perhaps. But the unique element of *Shore to Shore* lies in its double focus not only on today but on a time over 400 years earlier, in the time of Shakespeare, when England and Morocco were already engaged in cultural and commercial exchange, this time involving spices, slaves and embassies. Notably, the Barbary Pirates, many of whom were Europeans 'turned Turk', were active in seizing English, French, Dutch, Icelandic and other victims as slaves or hostages. Sale, near Rabat on the Moroccan Atlantic Coast, was a prime reception centre.

This reversal of ideas, that relations between countries are complex and things are not always as we think - that the slaves may be British! - is foundational to *Shore to Shore*. Our ambivalent attitudes about what is exotic and different, our fear and fascination, are the same attitudes that we often use the arts to explore. In terms of the project, we try to choose activities that show both similarity and difference between the cultures, that challenge and give delight at the same time. In due course, as language skills develop, we shall hope to frame some of them in words, especially since by that time we hope also to have established the sort of trust that allows genuine dialogue.

The project was originally inspired by Alison Atkinson's modern play *Entertaining Morocco*, about the Barbary Pirates but in order to have greater immediacy for Moroccans, and in view of the forthcoming Shakespeare centenaries, made a specific Shakespearean link, focusing in 2011 on 'Shakespeare and the Senses'.

Most importantly, by emphasizing a time with which even our English members are comparatively unfamiliar, it becomes much easier to hold an equal discussion and equal learning opportunities; just as Moroccans need to develop their English awareness, our English colleagues often need to become familiar with Elizabethan culture as well as Moroccan, and to speak French or Arabic. Many skills that can still be found in Essaouira and Marrakesh have faded away in England and are being sought again – marquetry and woodwork, cookery, embroidery and even some of the musical conversation that has been developed between Passamezzo, our music group, and the Soufi Song and Music group of Essaouira.

Apart from shortage of funds, the major difficulty for a project like *Shore to Shore* lies in enabling



Musicians playing together in UK



Music workshop with primary children in UK



Moroccan dance students performing after Shore to Shore workshop

Moroccans to come to England. Visas and extreme lack of resources have posed a significant problem, although so far we have been able to overcome them. Ahmed El Kaab and Boujemaa Soudani, musicians of international level skills and our main collaborators in Essaouira have twice been to England and have been able to conduct classes in schools and participate in joint concerts, rehearsals and presentations. Next year Boujemaa hopes to bring equipment to teach a group of disadvantaged young people how to make Gnaoua instruments and to play this sacred music which arises from the African slave tradition (Essaouira still traded in slaves well into the 20th century). Abdou is hoping to lead Sufi mediation classes, as well as developing and recording more music with Passamezzo as part of the project.

However, the internet gives us ever more useful, imaginative and inexpensive ways of overcoming travel limitations. Our focus is on the times of Elizabeth II as well as Elizabeth I, so we have chosen Photography as our way of exploring sight. This allows us to work with some very young, disadvantaged children in Essaouira who we shall be putting in touch with young children in Coventry to share their views of their life through a camera's eye. (In fact this element of the project, which more easily replicable than the performance or cookery, has been tried out successfully in the West African country of Benin which will be included in the web feature).

At Cadi Ayyed University in Marrakesh, where we work with the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, our activities have been adapted to suit a student audience, so include not only performances and workshops but also academic seminars on project themes such as freedom, intercultural exchange and Shakespeare and the Senses.

Especially exciting this year is the development of an Anglo-Moroccan Shakespeare Garden at the Faculty, which involves setting up a gardening club with English garden student

interested in dry gardening to work with it. This builds on REEP's traditional work with faith and horticulture. In due course we may even be able to grow herbs to contribute to the cookery workshops.

With our Moroccan Sufi musician colleagues, a Renaissance music band, two actors, a dancer, an expert in historic cookery, a Shakespeare expert and some academics, complemented by a multitude of Moroccan students, the project has blossomed. Andre Azoulay, one of the King of Morocco's counselors and a great promoter of interfaith dialogue, has become a patron. New people are full of development ideas and keen to become involved. Meanwhile, work is being evaluated by a PhD student at Coventry University Department of Peace & Reconciliation.

Shore to Shore is a work in progress, one where the progress is always informed by the experience of working together with flexibility, imagination and goodwill. Not always easy, it is always worthwhile and the many people so far involved have created a dynamic that carries us forward. In Tennyson's great words:

"There lies the port, the vessel puffs her sails..."

Come my friends,

'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.'

As further inspiration, The Dean of the Faculty, herself from a deep Sufi tradition, paid us the best complement we could hope for:

"This was more than promoting cultural awareness

...Shore to Shore also merges the sacred and the spiritual."

Preparation for 2013 goes on in a spirit of adventure and excitement, as well as some apprehension. This linking of England and Morocco, of Islam and Christianity, of culture old and new, similar and different is a compelling journey that we shall go on making.

For a more detailed description of the events of 2012, see the REEP online newsletter at www.reepinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/REEP-Newsletter-Spring-2012.pdf

The first series of *Shore to Shore* is recorded in a CD featuring music from Passamezzo and the Mogador Soufi Association of Chant and Music played separately and together. Please apply to director@reepinfo.org

A Flame of Love: MEVLANA



The thirteenth century Persian poet and mystic, Jalaluddin Rumi, a great Sufi Master, was born in Balkh in present-day Afghanistan. He is revered in Iran just as much as he is loved and respected in Turkey, where he later settled. The *Mathnawi* the great six volume spiritual masterpiece for which he is best known, was first written in Farsi.

This work is honoured as the Persian Qur'an and is a work of incredible beauty, inspirational depth and great insight. It is memorised and recited by Iranians in all walks of life. *Mathnawi* is actually not a title as such, but rather a type of poetry in rhyming couplets, which developed in Persia and which was used for epics. Rumi's *Mathnawi* is the best known of these epics.

During the summer of 1975, when our family was on holiday in England, I came upon a book in a friend's library entitled 'The Whirling Dervishes' by Ira Friedlander. This book was about Mevlana: his poetry, the ceremony of sema or whirling, and about the Sufis. There was a description of a tradesman spinning wool, who, as he spun chanted 'la illaha illa'Llah', in order to remain aware and always in the present. Every page of this book contained great wisdom and beauty: it was as if the text was strewn with exquisite jewels¹. One of the poems from the *Mathnawi*, *The Song of the Reed*, portrays the ardent longing and desire for God which I had experienced for such a long time. During its life on earth the soul remembers its bonding with God in eternity and longs for this connection again. It feels estranged in this world and always yearns to return to its homeland.

*'Hearken to this Reed forlorn,
Breathing ever since 'twas torn
From its rushy bed, a strain
Of impassioned love and pain.
"The secret of my song, though near,
None can see and none can hear.
Oh, for a friend to know the sign
And mingle all his soul with mine!
'Tis the flame of love that fired me,
'Tis the wine of Love inspired me.
Wouldst thou learn how lovers bleed,
Hearken, hearken to the Reed!'"* Rumi.²

In the meantime, and, indeed as a consequence of many new interpretations of his work, Rumi has become very popular in the West. Poetry readings are held in halls, tea shops and in private houses and his verses appear on the internet. People make pilgrimages to Konya to visit his mausoleum and to attend the Mevlevi sema ceremony on the 17th December, the anniversary of his death.

Rumi was a theologian and mystic who taught at the university in Konya during the reign of the Seljuk Sultan Kaykobad II. He was much respected and revered by Konya society. Originating from a Sufi background he was drawn to Sufism, studying for a time under a Sufi master, Burhanu'l-Din of Tirmidhi. He became a Sheikh in his own right. Maulana or Mevlana, as the Turks call him, means 'our master'. He was born in Balkh in 1207 but left there as a young child when his father travelled first to Mecca and then throughout the Middle East, fleeing from the Mongul hordes. Eventually, in 1228 the family was invited by the Sultan to settle in Konya. Rumi's father, a Sufi theologian and jurisprudent was offered a position as teacher of Islam there. His son Jalaluddin took over his position after his death in 1231.

There are different variations to the story about the momentous meeting between Jalaluddin Rumi and the wandering dervish Shamsuddin Muhammad Tabrizi, called Shams-i Tabriz, (the Sun of Tabriz). Rumi's whole life as a theologian was completely turned upside down by this meeting of overwhelming magnitude. One story relates that he met Shams as he was coming out of the *madrasah* followed by his students and scholars. Shams is said to have been a dervish of the Qalandar tradition with strong roots in Shamanism. He had been travelling around the Middle East looking for someone who could, as he said, 'endure my company'. Upon meeting Mevlana he asked him, "Who is greater, Muhammad or Abu Yazid al Bistami?" Rumi answered, "What sort of question is that? Of course Muhammad is greater! He is the Seal of the Prophets! Every day he passed through many different stages and asked God's forgiveness for the previous stage. But Bayazid was in awe of each stage which he reached, thinking it was the supreme one." Bayazid is related to have once uttered in ecstasy, 'Praise be to me. How great is my Majesty!' when he had reached a state of God-consciousness. The orthodox interpreted this utterance as blasphemy³. (Abu Yazid or Bayazid was a 9th century Persian mystic who was known as 'the first of the drunken Sufis'. He reached such states of rapture that he felt he was in complete unity with or annihilation in God⁴). The Prophet Muhammad's prayer to Allah was, 'We do not know You as You deserve to be known'. When he understood how profound and

JALALUDDIN RUMI

outrageous Shams' question was, Rumi is said to have fallen from his camel onto the ground in a faint.⁵

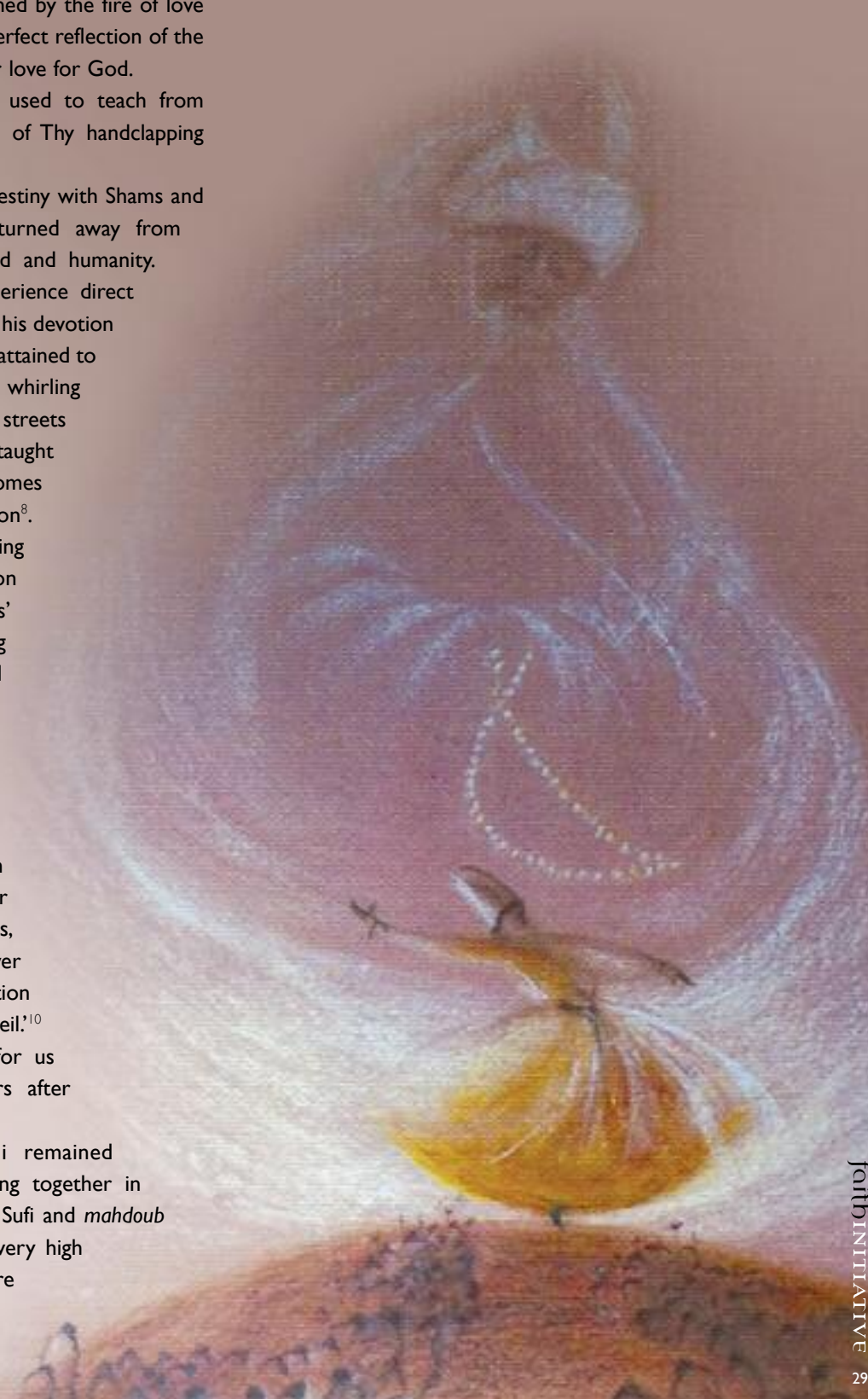
The two became inseparable and were so enraptured by mystical love that they went into retreat and meditated together for months. Jalaluddin was totally consumed by the fire of love for his soul mate (whom he saw as the perfect reflection of the Divine Beloved)⁶, as well as by his greater love for God.

'I was the country's sober ascetic, I used to teach from the pulpit - but destiny made me one of Thy handclapping lovers.' Rumi.⁷

As a consequence of this meeting of destiny with Shams and his intoxicating love for him, Rumi turned away from dogmatism and became a lover of God and humanity. Through Shams, Rumi was able to experience direct knowledge of God. Again, it was owing to his devotion to Shams and his worship of God that he attained to ecstatic states. He began to turn in a whirling dance with his arms outstretched in the streets of Konya. Some say it was Shams who taught him how to turn, and that this turning comes from sacred dances of the Shaman tradition⁸. Another version relates how he was walking in the goldsmiths' market one day, and upon hearing the rhythm of the goldsmiths' hammers he began to whirl. Being completely carried away by love, he heard the Name of Allah everywhere.⁹

The Mevlevi Order, which was founded after his death, carried on this tradition of turning and the Whirling Dervishes are now very well-known in the West. When they turn they recite the Name of Allah which inspires the heart, bringing inner peace. One of Jalaluddin Rumi's sayings, often quoted by the Sufis, states, 'Whatever distracts our hearts from the contemplation and remembrance of our Lord is a veil.'¹⁰ Mevlana's words still hold a message for us today, more than seven hundred years after his death.

Shams-i Tabriz and Jalaluddin Rumi remained inseparable for a couple of years, sitting together in spiritual communion. Shams was a great Sufi and *mahdoub* (madman of God), who had reached a very high spiritual station. The people of Konya were shocked and outraged that their



most respected scholar and doctor of the Law was consorting with this wild-looking, wandering dervish to the neglect of his family and pupils. Mevlana's *mureeds* were extremely jealous of the time their master spent with this seemingly irreverent and outrageous vagabond, who certainly didn't appear to adhere to dogma and rituals. They became hostile and actually threatened Shams, telling him to leave Konya. Shams went to Damascus without a word to Mevlana, who was heartbroken, sending his son to look for him.

There was a tremendous outpouring of his heart in poetry throughout the period after he met Shams, particularly when he was so completely overwhelmed with sadness at the loss of his friend. After a time Shams arrived back in Konya, accompanied by Mevlana's son. The reunion of the two was such that 'one did not know who was lover and who was beloved'¹¹. They spent their time meditating, sitting knee to knee in a cell, and communicating from heart to heart about the highest of spiritual questions. This became so unbearable for his disciples that they called Shams out of Jalaluddin's house one night. From that night onwards he mysteriously disappeared and it was not known what had happened to him. Jalaluddin was inconsolable. His son tried to comfort him and alleviate his worst fears that Shams was dead. It is suspected that he was murdered by Mevlana's disciples.

In his extreme grief at the loss of Shams, Mevlana wrote passionate lyrics collected in his great work *Divan-i-Kabir*. He even wrote Shams-i Tabriz's name to his verses, as an act of humility, describing his love for him, but quintessentially for God: his longing, ecstasy and desolation.¹² Owing to his ecstatic states in his high spiritual station and his despair, he whirled in the streets of Konya.

One day, Mevlana and

one of his disciples, Husamuddin Çelebi, were walking in the vineyards. Husamuddin, who was devoted to Mevlana, encouraged him to write a new work in *Mathnawi* form. From

the folds of his turban Mevlana smilingly produced a piece of paper upon which were the first eighteen lines of the *Mathnawi*, 'Listen to this reed forlorn...' From then on, Jalaluddin Rumi composed and recited his great work of teaching stories in rhyming couplets which Husamuddin wrote down until Mevlana's death. The *Mathnawi* consisted of more than 25,000 verses.¹³ Rumi's literary accomplishments were tremendous. Not only did he write the *Divan-i Kabir* under the

influence of his consuming love for Shams, but he also wrote lyrical poetry and his 'table talks' called *Fihī ma fihī*.¹⁴

*Whatever distracts
our hearts from the
contemplation and
remembrance of our
Lord is a veil.*



Drawings by Ingrid Schaar who accompanied dervishes in Istanbul and Konya. Reflecting upon her work she said: "I have a white piece of paper and the picture comes into being through inspiration".

1 Ira Friedlander, *The Whirling Dervishes*, P. 15.

2 R.A. Nicholson, *Rumi Poet and Mystic*, P. 31.

3 Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, P. 75-6.

4 Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Pp 47-49

5 Annemarie Schimmel, *Ich bin Wind und Du bist Feuer*, P. 18-19.

6 William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love, The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, P. 4.

7 Ibid, P.3. From *Dīwān-i Shamsi-i Tabrīzī*, No. 22784

8 Shakina Reinhertz, *Women called to the Path of Rumi*, P. 9; Mehmet Önder, *Mevlāna Jelaeddin Rūmī*, P. 63.

9 Ira Friedlander, *The Whirling Dervishes*, P. 56.

10 Ibid, P. 36, quoted from the *Mathnawi*.

11 Annemarie Schimmel, *Ich bin Wind und Du bist Feuer*, P. 21.

12 William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love, The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*, P. 4.

13 Mehmet Önder, *Mevlāna Jelaeddin Rumi*, P. 130-340.

14 Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, P. 315-6.

THE DIVERSITY GAME

In the spring of 1998 a multi-religious group, including myself, from Suffolk Inter-faith Resource (SIFRE) went on a fascinating study tour of Israel. With our background in inter-religious dialogue we were shocked at the blinkered outlook of people we met, whether inhabitants, tourists or pilgrims and proposed to find a resource which would challenge people to grapple with their own backgrounds and agendas while taking on board the context in which they found themselves. We proposed that sometime in the near future we would devise a board game that would do just that.

Toward the end of the tour we visited Jericho and at the foot of the Mountain of Temptations I slipped and broke my ankle. After emergency treatment in Jericho and Jerusalem I eventually reached Ipswich hospital where, confined to bed for several weeks and in plaster for 19 weeks, I started work on the proposed game with help and encouragement from SIFRE colleagues.

My hospital experiences reinforced our determination. Here too people's backgrounds were not taken into account and their needs not dealt with holistically. The religious and cultural traditions of staff and patients were not considered, and even their basic human needs were often ignored. We felt that people who worked in hospitals - at all levels - needed to consider more closely the kind of medical and personal treatment provided in full light of a person's identity.

There was an enthusiastic response from other agencies to the idea of developing a training game to address these issues, in particular the Suffolk County Council. The scope was enlarged to cover all aspects of life, and to provide an opportunity for everybody to become sensitised to, and equipped for, the challenges of living and working in our increasingly multi-faith and multi-cultural society. First produced in-house, and trialled among SIFRE members, the prototype game soon made its way into the public domain and was subsequently named Diversity by a Social Worker.

To give some insight into the way in which Diversity has been received I give below an extract from an article submitted by the Equality and Human Rights' Commission of the East of England Region:

Playing the 'Diversity' card is proving a strong driver for understanding in hundreds of UK organisations ranging from businesses to prisons, from the emergency services to schools and colleges. As a result, the training tool DIVERSITY, devised and developed by SIFRE, is being highlighted, in the European Year of Equal Opportunities, as a positive example of projects in the UK working to create a fairer and more equal society.

DIVERSITY invites participants to face up to a series of challenges but, rather than from the restrictive comfort of their own background, to do so as a member of a faith group that is unfamiliar to them.

It provides them with basic information that enables them to enter into a discussion with the rest of the group. It highlights facts and challenges ignorance and misconceptions. Designed for 12 people, together with a facilitator, it works well with fewer and has involved groups as large as 30, successfully.

Covering twelve faiths found in the East of England (Bahai's, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Humanists, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Pagans, Sikhs, Taoists and Zoroastrians), some 2,000 copies of DIVERSITY are already in circulation. Sessions usually last for 2-3 hours, and involve everyone in lively discussion, engagement with complex issues and moments of great insight or pure humour.



A Diversity Training Session for Care Assistants in Oakham



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SPECIAL OFFER for Faith Initiative readers:

the game and mat together with an extra set of faith cards can be purchased for £60 including postage and packaging (see contact details below)

A Training Course based around the game Diversity[®] involving tutors from different faiths can be arranged through the East of England Faiths Agency C.I.C. A two hour training session run by a Facilitator can be provided for £90.00.

Additional input from one or more of our Faith Tutors can be provided at a cost of £90.00 per tutor/2 hour session.

The game is exclusively available from The East of England Faiths Agency C.I.C., The Inter-Faith Centre, The West Building, c/o University Campus Suffolk, Waterfront Building, 19 Neptune Quay, Ipswich, IP4 1QJ or Phone 01379 678615 (24 hour answer phone service)

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Together...

It was heartrending on the 5th August 2012 to receive news that a shooting had taken place in the Sikh Gurudwara of Oak Creek, Milwaukee, Wisconsin USA. The Sikh community had been participating in their weekly prayers when a gunman - later identified as a white supremacist - opened fire on them randomly killing six worshippers. The victims of the shooting included Satwant Singh Kaleka, 62, the President of the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin; Sita Singh, 41; Ranjit Singh, 49; Prakash Singh, 39, a granthi at the Gurdwara; Paramjit Kaur, 41; and Suveg Singh Khattria, 84.

I and my fellow Sikhs, at individual level and as a diaspora community, have been receiving support from people of all faiths and none, and many prayers have been said across the globe by different faith communities. Such world-wide concern for the well-being of the Sikh community is heart-warming.

Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke, President of the World Congress of Faiths, wrote,

'Please be assured of the prayers and sympathy of the World Congress of Faiths at this sad time following the immense tragedy at the Sikh Gurudwara in Oak Creek. Please pass on our condolences to other Sikhs across the world.'

Another friend wrote,

'I pray that God will give you the strength to lovingly and prayerfully support your grieving community, and the wisdom to harness righteous anger and fear, to work towards the creating of a better world. Educating humankind about all the many good qualities of the Sikh people is obviously desirable, as is making a clear distinction in the minds of the public between practising Sikhs and perpetrators of terrorism. Additionally, I do recommend the exploration of new paradigm approaches to global security, whereby mankind's problems are dealt with at the root level, rather than merely at the symptom level. Only a new and better seed will produce a new and better crop!'

We are touched by the statements of support from President Obama, Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh and Governor Mitt Romney at this sad time and we appreciate President Obama ordering flags to fly at half-mast in solidarity with our community in mourning.

I am sure that many members of the community associated with this magazine share these sentiments and on their behalf I offer condolences to the victims of the tragedy, their loved ones and their community.

A statement from the World Sikh Council (American Region) reads:

"May God grant families of the deceased the strength to bear the loss of their loved ones, and grant healing and solace to the wounded hearts.

Together, we will try our best to heal from this tragedy. Together we will try to bring peace to the misguided and troubled minds. Together we will endeavour to ensure that no person and no community feels unsafe and intimidated by such violence."

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ORGAN DONATION:

An Interfaith Study

This Study of attitudes to kidney transplantation in different faiths arose out of the relatively long wait for kidney transplantation of some clients from ethnic minorities who attend Renal Units. For example, I came to know one gentleman from Bangladesh in his early thirties who was of blood group B, for which a kidney is less likely to become available. He felt isolated, stigmatised by his community and unable to find work or a wife. He regarded kidney failure as a repugnant disability and was unable to talk about it to his family and friends. Since I wrote this article I am glad to say a kidney has been found and he has also found a wife! He waited several years for both.

The proportion of those awaiting kidney transplants is much higher in the ethnic minority groups than in the general population. Some cities have appointed special workers to address this and inform the local communities.

The issue of transplantation is vital because it usually provides better quality of life for those suffering from end stage renal failure and it is also cost effective. It does, however, raise moral issues concerning removing organs from a healthy donor and related problems regarding an individual's consent to have organs removed for the sake of others. Over 30% of relatives refuse donation of organs when asked, often because of the short time given to make a decision and possibly for religious and cultural reasons, which are the subject of this paper. The situation has changed in the last few years in that there are now many more related donors and some altruistic donors. Medical knowledge has improved and now transplantation is more possible although the waiting list is still long.

Living donation seems natural. Giving to another in this way shows great compassion which is the way of the Buddha.

My study consisted of personal interviews with people from different countries and of questionnaires sent to contacts in different faith communities in Great Britain, concerning cultural, religious and personal attitudes to transplantation including cadaver organs and living donors, and to both receiving and donating kidneys. There was a question concerning carrying donor cards, and about spreading awareness. There were roughly the same number of men and women, 40-50 in total between 30 and 75 years of age, practising members of their own faiths and of reasonably good educational background. The replies showed no particular sex or age bias.

Knowledge about the shortage of kidneys varies greatly. Some people had given the matter great thought, others did not know that there was a shortage of organs. There were misgivings about brain stem death, and suggestions that equal concern should be given to the needs of the dying as the living. In spite of the objective actions taken by the medical profession at the time of death, there were anxieties about treating the body with care and dignity. Some wanted absolute assurance that the donor had given consent. Others had difficulties with the body being kept alive artificially for the organs to be removed. A warm, heart beating body is hard to consider dead even if the brain is not functional. The Leicester General Hospital scheme of identifying asystolic [non heart beating] donors has led to a marginally higher rate of relative consent but this information is very technical and mostly unknown to those not involved.

The following are various quotes from some of the people of different faith traditions whom I interviewed.

HINDUISM

"There is no objection to receiving or donating organs in Hinduism but there are certain rites for the dying person. Cremation is usually within 24 hours".

"Asian people often have a sense of continuity and sanctity of the soul. The soul needs to be freed from its former connections when it leaves the body. There is fear of mutilation of the body."

"Cremation occurs quickly. People do not think about organ donation."

"There is a feeling of fatalism in terms of illness. Renal failure is the will of God and it is useless to interfere or obstruct it. There is also fear of the surgeon's knife."

"Donating a living organ is acceptable provided full information is given to the donor."

CHRISTIANITY

The majority interviewed agreed with donating and receiving kidneys and about half carried kidney donor cards. However, some felt that ethics had not caught up with medical advances. Some who only believed in burial did not want their body to be 'carved up'. Another wondered how the body and mind reacts to receiving a living organ. Living donor donation is acceptable provided full explanations are given to both the donor and the recipient. The impetus is self-sacrificial love.

ISLAM/MUSLIM

Post mortem kidney transplantation should be less of a problem in Islam than other organs because the Hadith explicitly states that in the garden of Paradise there will never be a need to urinate. Organ donation was made "halal" in 1982 by the senior "ulama" commission in Saudi Arabia. A person donating kidneys

is eligible for a reward in the hereafter.

"There are conservative and liberal views in Islam but because of the belief in physical resurrection there is a desire to keep the body intact."

BUDDHISM

Most Buddhists regard organ donation very positively as it stems from a compassionate belief to benefit others. If it is truly the wish of the dying person it will not harm in any way the consciousness that is leaving the donor in the process of giving organs. It turns into a good karma.

"Some believe that human beings are created according to a certain design that should not be artificially modified. A kidney may be meant for one body only. There is attachment to one's body."

"Living donation seems natural. Giving to another in this way shows great compassion which is the way of the Buddha."

SIKHISM

A small study Sikhs in Coventry in 1996 found that there were a number of misgivings to do with reincarnation and mutilation, [also found in my study] and anxieties about the technical and clinical aspects of the transplantation process, but most felt

donation to be a highly altruistic action. The study concluded that barriers to transplantation were more due to lack of knowledge and understanding than because of religious and cultural factors. *"Orthodox Sikhs would not want their bodies messed around but the more liberal will both accept and donate."*

"In India major medical intervention is less common than in the West. Fewer people are kept alive by artificial means. We feel the time of death is ordained by God and nothing can change this. People are more accepting of death. Life continues through reincarnation."

JUDAISM

In Judaism there are laws which ban mutilation of, and benefiting from a corpse, however, saving a life can take precedence. Orthodox rules are stricter than Reform. Organs from a living person are permitted provided this does not endanger the life of the donor.

"There is a reluctance to face death and a feeling that the body should remain within the community coupled with a mistrust of western medicine. There is a belief that God's will should be accepted and of the sacredness of the human body."

LIVING DONATION

There was a wide consensus that few people knew about the possibility of becoming a living donor, even more an altruistic donor. There was some anxiety that in parts of the world poor people are willing to sell their organs and that in others such as China, kidneys are removed from executed criminals. Most of those interviewed agreed to donation from living donors provided all were fully aware of the implications. It was felt that the psychological results of failure could be traumatic and long lasting.

PUBLICITY

Everyone agreed that more publicity and information was needed in all cultures. Suggestions included launching educational campaigns, talks by sufferers from kidney failure, general articles, big poster advertising and information campaigns and the provision of donor cards in all surgeries. In some countries including Britain the willingness to donate is recorded on the driving license. Presumed consent has ethical difficulties and would, I think, although practised in some European countries, not be acceptable with others, because the wishes of the family may not always be considered.

Reporting good news about successful transplantation is helpful. I met a gentleman who received a kidney from his twin sister 34 years ago and who was said to be the longest surviving transplant patient in the United Kingdom and possibly Europe.

*Scientific practice
has to live alongside
the individual's
deeply held beliefs.*

CONCLUSION

In spite of all the publicity it seems clear that there is a need for much more research and a greater dissemination of knowledge to all the many cultural groups in our increasingly multi-faith societies.

Most of the major faiths appear to agree on the merits of donation but there are continuously repeated concerns and "if distress is to be avoided guidelines for the harvesting of organs will (need to) be modified by religious and cultural views concerning the integrity of the body" [David Lamb, 1993]. Scientific practice has to live alongside the individual's deeply held beliefs. The interests of the donor of a kidney organ and the interests of the potential recipient need to be carefully balanced. In living donors, while maximising the availability of donor organs, it is important to ensure that the donor is acting freely and in an informed way. The principle of respect for the individual patient is the cornerstone of medical ethics. A happy story was printed in the Lancet in

May 1998 when two married couples, one Jewish and the other Muslim in Israel donated and received each other's kidneys, a wonderful example of cross cultural/religious co-operation.

Since writing this article there has been a lot more publicity to the need for organ donation, and medical advances in matching and pairing recipients and donors. Nevertheless, the need for sensitivity in dealing with relations of a potential donor even if the donor has already made his/her wishes in the affirmative is vital. That the dead relative may have given life to someone else who might be dying otherwise can be a great source of comfort and inspiration to those left behind.

from Fear to Faith



Donation is a hot topic in the Black and Asian & Minority Ethnic community (BAME), with the launch of the National Black and Asian Transplant Alliance (NBTA) planned for 4 July 2012.

Most individuals are happy to accept an organ when they need it, however, there are often debates within Faith communities about whether organ donation is allowed or not. Or even when is a person dead, when the heart stops or when brain activity ceases.

Within the Hindu Communities there is a polarisation amongst those who believe they can and should give their organs and those that believe they should not. The 'should not' camp seem to be of the opinion that there is 'retained' memory in the organs which then influences the recipient, and that the karma (the good deeds and bad deeds) accumulated by the recipient will effect the soul of the donor. However they often are thinking of the negative aspects of both the aforementioned; for if the recipient was of more exemplary character surely using this logic their deeds will improve karma of the donor; and vice versa. There are other beliefs which limits donation such as; if one gives away or leaves without a particular organ in this life, one may be born without that particular organ in the next life. My answer to this is to ask the person if they have all their hair and teeth! This usually brings a very confused look on their faces, after which they usually say "no I have not" and leave the encounter in a very thoughtful stance. As you can tell I personally believe in organ donation.

Hindu Forum of Britain of which I am secretary general also believes that Sanatan Dharma allows us to donate, and that it is a good thing to do for our karma. Dana – selfless giving of ones' wealth and health is one of the highest forms of giving, others being giving of your service etc.

*"Of all things that it is possible to donate,
to donate your own body is infinitely
more worthwhile."*

The Manusmruti

Hindu Forum is an umbrella body for British Hindus and we first became involved in the subject of organ donation in 2008 when we arranged focus groups for a research project on the issue with the University of Bedfordshire. Building on this work in 2009 we once again worked on a research project this time with the Organ Donor Campaign, with whom we set up a national focus group. For this national focus group we brought together community leaders from different denominations and geographical locations for a focus group which ODC then conducted. Present were the Swaminarayan, International Society for Krishna Consciousness ISKCON popularly known as the Hare Krishna's, other Vaishnavas, Shaivites, and Shaktas.

The end result of this work was a grant from government to increase donors registering from our community. The sum was tiny and we used it to focus on the Hindu Community in the North-West of London although the resources produced, a leaflet and DVD, has reached continental Europe and Africa as well. The main event was a conference held in July 2011 at which the DVD and leaflet was launched. The event was held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Temple at Neasden. We invited groups from the North-West of London and had a panel of speakers and workshops ranging from clinicians, donors and recipients and spiritual leaders of two traditions; the Jains and Hindus. In the true spirit of Dharma, we decided to include the Jains in our small grant pot when we realised that there was no pot at all for them. Also sometimes it is difficult to separate the two

communities as culturally we are meshed as one, sometimes it is difficult to tell us apart even by name. Hindu Forum has member groups that have both Jain and Hindu members, and indeed all Jain groups as well.

The DVD we produced has messages from faith perspective as does the leaflet. Our spiritual commissioner His Grace Gauri Das spoke passionately at the event and mentioned that Dadichi, a sage, had donated even the bones of his body for the preservation of Good. And therefore we should not shirk from donating our organs if they can help another after our death.

*If my body can help
someone else live a
better quality of life
after my soul has
vacated it then it is
good Seva (service)*

Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2:2 says:

*"Vasami jirnani yatha vihaya navani grhnati naro 'parani
tatha sarirani vihaya jirnany anyani samyati navandi dehi"*

*As a person puts on new garments giving up the old ones,
the soul similarly accepts new material bodies giving up
the old and useless one.*

As a whole the body may be old and useless however some of the organs may be perfect and able to help another body which may be perfect in other ways but has one defective organ. So as the President of Hindu Forum of Britain, Arjan Vekaria JP, has said; "I believe in organ donation. If my body can help someone else live a better quality of life after my soul has vacated it then it is good Seva (service)."

On a personal level I used to live in fear of physical pain and so I would not sign because I thought I may feel pain when the organs were removed but as I have grown in my faith I have also got over my fear and have signed up for organ donation. I no longer have qualms about feeling pain. I think many people in the Hindu community are at the same level as me. Each has to make that journey from their fear to their faith and conviction, and start to live Dharma and not just talk about it.

Held in Love

“See! I will not forget you... I have carved you on the palm of my hand.”

Isaiah 49:15

Doctor Daddy, Doctor Daddy. Come quickly, come quickly. Granma is poorly. Granma is poorly!’ ‘What’s the matter with her Mylo?’

‘She’s poorly! She’s got a sore tummy!’, came the high pitched squeaky little voice. Simultaneously a little sticky hand grabbed my blouse as I lay groaning on the settee, yanked it up at great speed and thrust his Daddy’s hand now holding the red plastic stethoscope onto my stomach.

Sadly for three year old Mylo, with his intent little face under the glinting copper curls now staring down at my midriff, his daddy and I just exploded into laughter. As our eyes locked together for that one instant of sheer joy perhaps we both remembered that things hadn’t always been so. My son David and I have much to thank God for.

Only five years ago we had both shared such a depth of grabbing pain when David’s voice came haltingly over the phone, “I don’t want to leave you and dad. I want to be there to look after you.” We were both crying. This was my lowest point. David suddenly in a state of collapse had been diagnosed with chronic kidney failure and he and I were now facing his mortality.

Prayer to my Heavenly Father has always been a central part of my existence. I learnt to pray as a child and through my now almost seventy years I know I have been held in love throughout and always my prayers have been heard and answered. Thankfulness sits in my heart and ‘Thank you dear Father’, are the words that sit nearest to my lips from my inner voice.

Yes, I cried out from the depths of that heaviness and I was heard. This was my lowest point in the whole of the nine months leading up to the transplant and I was heard. Within minutes of David’s call a dear friend phoned and then another. Both calls were ‘out of the blue’, both were full of empathy and love. I don’t believe in coincidences, only ‘God incidences.’ I believe that the Holy Spirit had nudged each of them at that moment to speak to me and to reassure me that all would be well. I felt held in love. My Heavenly Father was aware of my immediate need and He responded.

And this same reassurance stayed with me throughout. So many wonderful things happened which made me so conscious of God’s presence and attention to detail. David lives in the

Midlands and I live in the West of Scotland. The surgery was to be in Nottingham. Initially my two other sons Peter and Andrew and my husband John and myself all travelled to Nottingham to be tested for compatibility. Andrew, John and my self each had 50% compatibility but in this I felt very selfish. There was no way I could face the pain of loosing another son or my husband so I pleaded with Anne my assigned transplant coordinator nurse to allow me to be the donor. I was so very fortunate because I was well and was on no medication.

This was agreed and for the next nine months John and I had countless enjoyable and reassuring trips to Lichfield and then to Nottingham for test after test checking my health and suitability. It really was a wonderful opportunity to travel with my husband, to be with my son, to bond with my beautiful daughter in law and to have this super ‘M.O.T.’ all for free on the N.H.S. I also learnt that at that time my allotted surgeon Mr Shehata was one of only two pioneer surgeons in Great Britain able to do the transplants using keyhole surgery. Now how amazing was that? I really

was being cared for and I had so much to thank my Heavenly Father for.

On each trip south I saw Mr. Shehata. Over the nine months I came to trust him implicitly and had no fear of the impending surgery. However in one of the early meetings he made me exceedingly angry.

“Why are you giving a kidney to your son?” he asked sharply.

“Why would I not want to give a kidney to my son?” I quickly replied, his sharp tone hitting me like a ton of bricks.

“You might die!” he hit back, his eyes averted from me as he glared into the notes he was making.

How dare he speak to me like that? I thought. This man is devoid of all communication skills. I was boiling inside. In a very quiet and controlled voice I managed a reply. “I’m not afraid of dying.”

For a moment there was stillness in the room and then he gesticulated to David and John who were sitting a few spaces to my left. “What about them?” he almost barked, “You’ll leave them on their own!”

And with every bit of control I could muster I looked over at the head still staring into his notes and quietly said, “I’ll be there to welcome them when they join me.”

‘Thank you dear Father’, are the words that sit nearest to my lips from my inner voice.

At the time this encounter really threw me as I was expecting a very empathic Mr Shehata. Looking back I can see he did the right thing, he had to reach me and I had to be made aware of the enormity of what I was doing and the ultimate danger. Any surgery comes with its risks. In doing so he had difficulty in looking at me but he made me aware of my own emotions and the reality of my own faith.

And this faith held me strong throughout. David's blood pressure had been stabilised when his condition had been first diagnosed but he was ill and we could all see this. It was sore to see our depleted son who had been so physically strong, able to run up two munros in an afternoon and now struggling to walk halfway up his garden. All I could do was to cup my hands and offer him to our dear heavenly Father and He took him and held him safe.

Wonderfully, the creatinine, the impurities in his blood, stayed constant for the first few months but then it began to rise and there was the looming possibility that David would need to go on dialysis. The chances of a successful transplant would then be lessened. There was also a further complication. My final scan showed that I had an aneurysm (an arterial weakness) at the entrance to my right kidney. To test another donor would take

another nine months. David did not have another nine months. Mr Shehata thoughtfully decided to go ahead. The right kidney would be taken, the aneurysm removed and he would come into the hospital that weekend to do the transplant. Immediacy was paramount.

On the night before the operation I had the most wonderful spiritual experience. I was medication and worry free just quietly lying in that busy Florence Nightingale ward. And yet I felt as if I was floating freely on a wave of soft gentle loving prayer. Was this the tangibility of God's love? Even writing about it just now is a wonderful feeling. I knew that so many people were praying for both David and myself and I thank them.

That peace stayed with me. On the Saturday morning I walked calmly into the operating room. Mr Shehata took my kidney and then proceeded to place it into David, so undertaking both parts of the surgery himself. As a pioneer of keyhole surgery in kidney transplants he was certainly up for the challenge of removing a 'mere' aneurysm. Mr. Shehata saved both of our lives. We have each so much to be thankful for.

And what joy there was to wake up in the ward surrounded by a semi circle of loving faces. There was my dear husband, my son Andrew from London, Joanna and her parents Deirdre and



Geoff from Wales, Mr. Shehata, Anne my coordinator nurse and the so considerate anaesthetist. Loving memories that will never leave me.

Recovery was speedy. I was only on the ward for three days and then moved into the 'hotel' part of the hospital where wonderfully I now shared a room with my husband who was obviously concerned for both his wife and his son. Together we were now able to visit David who was in the Renal Unit. What joy to see David looking so well and happy again, the body's instant response to a fully working kidney. But what distress to see the pain and sense of hopelessness on the yellow faces of others in that unit who had no donor. The image of one such young man creeping slowly almost bent double with a wan smile to me will stay with me forever.

There I was alive and well and in no pain. David refused all pain relieving drugs and was pink and healthy looking. After two weeks I was free of all medication and at no time had I

experienced one iota of pain. Within three months I had a glorious weekend on the Scottish Island of Eigg and happily climbed An Sgurr. Four years later I am still climbing munros.

And there were even more blessings in store. David, knowing that he would be on a cocktail of drugs for the rest of his life, had his sperm frozen prior to the surgery and Joanna went through intensive IVF treatment to produce and save precious eggs. Not only do we all have the joy of three year old Mylo now but all the cuddles of one year old Lyra. A further blessing is that there was news only two weeks ago, at the time of writing, that an 83 year old man had recently successfully donated one of his kidneys altruistically. For us

as a family this is good news for it means that if John stays well and David needs another kidney in the next ten years John can go forward as a second donor for our son.

*"Dear Heavenly Father, Dear Lord Jesus,
Dear Holy Spirit, Thank you!"*

*...he made me
aware of my own
emotions and the
reality of my
own faith.*

*"The kidney transplant transformed my life
but my biggest fear was not for myself.
My prayers were only for my Mum
because she was putting her life at risk for me.
I got better straight away,
I was praying she would come out of it alright."*

David

A future not our own

*It helps, now and then, to step back
and take the long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.*

*We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of
the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.
Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.*

*No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No programme accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.*

*This is what we are about:
We plant seed that one day will grow.
We water seed already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.*

*We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.*

*We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are not workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.*



Oscar Romero was a priest and bishop in El Salvador. His love for his people who were suffering violence and oppression led him to take their side and to denounce their oppressors. And so he was killed, whilst saying Mass, on 24th March 1980.

Please see www.romerotrust.org.uk for more details

FALLING UPWARD

A SPIRITUALITY FOR THE TWO HALVES OF LIFE

Extract from: *Falling Upward* by Richard Rohr published by SPCK 2012

The soul has many secrets. They are only revealed to those who want them, and are never completely forced upon us. One of the best-kept secrets, and yet one hidden in plain sight, is that *the way up is the way down*. Or, if you prefer, *the way down is the way up*. This pattern is obvious in all of nature, from the very change of seasons and substances on this earth, to the six hundred million tons of hydrogen that the sun burns every day to light and warm our earth, and even to the metabolic laws of dieting or fasting. The down-up pattern is constant, too, in mythology, in stories like that of Persephone, who must descend into the underworld and marry Hades for spring to be reborn.

In legends and literature, sacrifice of something to achieve something else is almost the only pattern. Dr. Faust has to sell his soul to the devil to achieve power and knowledge; Sleeping Beauty must sleep for a hundred years before she can receive the prince's kiss. In Scripture, we see that the wrestling and wounding of Jacob are necessary for Jacob to become Israel (Genesis 32:26–32), and the death and resurrection of Jesus are necessary to create Christianity. The loss and renewal pattern is so constant and ubiquitous that it should hardly be called a secret at all.

Yet it is still a secret, probably because we do not *want* to see it. We do not want to embark on a further journey if it feels like going down, especially after we have put so much sound and fury into going up. This is surely the first and primary reason why many people never get to the fullness of their own lives. The supposed achievements of the first half of life have to fall apart and show themselves to be wanting in some way, or we will not move further. Why would we?

Normally a job, fortune, or reputation has to be lost, a death has to be suffered, a house has to be flooded, or a disease has to be endured. The pattern in fact is so clear that one has to work rather hard, or be intellectually lazy, to miss the continual

lesson. This, of course, was Scott Peck's major insight in his best-selling book, *The Road Less Traveled*. He told me personally once that he felt most Western people were just spiritually lazy. And when we are lazy, we stay on the path we are already on, even if it is going nowhere. It is the spiritual equivalent of the second law of thermodynamics: everything winds down unless some outside force winds it back up. True spirituality could

be called the "outside force," although surprisingly it is found "inside," but we will get to that later.

Some kind of falling, what I will soon call "necessary suffering," is programmed into the journey. All the sources seem to say it, starting with Adam and Eve and all they represent. Yes, they "sinned" and were cast out of the Garden of Eden, but from those very acts came "consciousness," conscience, and their own further journey. But it all started with transgression. Only people unfamiliar with sacred story are surprised that they ate the apple. As soon as God told them specifically not to, you know they will! It creates the whole story line inside of which we can find ourselves.

It is not that suffering or failure *might* happen, or that it will only happen to you if you are bad (which is what religious people often think), or that it will happen to the unfortunate, or to a few in other places, or that you can somehow by cleverness or righteousness avoid it. No, it *will* happen, and to you! Losing, failing, falling, sin, and the suffering that comes from those experiences – all of this is a necessary and even good part of the human journey. As my favorite mystic, Lady Julian of Norwich, put it in her Middle English, "Sin is behovely!"

You cannot avoid sin or mistake anyway (Romans 5:12), but if you try too fervently, it often creates even worse problems. Jesus loves to tell stories like those of the publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9–14) and the famous one about the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32), in which one character does his life totally



right and is, in fact, wrong; and the other who does it totally wrong ends up God's beloved! Now deal with that! Jesus also tells us that there are two groups who are very good at trying to deny or avoid this humiliating surprise: *those who are very "rich" and those who are very "religious."* These two groups have very different plans for themselves, as they try to totally steer their own ships with well-chosen itineraries. They follow two different ways of going "up" and avoiding all "down."

Such a down-and-then-up perspective does not fit into our Western philosophy of progress, nor into our desire for upward mobility, nor into our religious notions of perfection or holiness. "Let's hope it is not true, at least for me," we all say! Yet the perennial tradition, sometimes called the wisdom tradition, says that it is and will always be true. St. Augustine called it the passing over mystery (or the "paschal mystery" from the Hebrew word for Passover, *pesach*).

Today we might use a variety of metaphors: reversing engines, a change in game plan, a falling off of the very wagon that we constructed. No one would choose such upheaval consciously; we must somehow "fall" into it. Those who are too carefully engineering their own superiority systems will usually not allow it at all. It is much more *done to you* than anything you do yourself, and sometimes non-religious people are more open to this change in strategy than are religious folks who have their private salvation project all worked out. This is how I would interpret Jesus' enigmatic words, "The children of this world are wiser in their ways than the children of light" (Luke 16:8). I have met too many rigid and angry old Christians and clergy to deny this sad truth, but it seems to be true in all religions until and unless they lead to the actual transformation of persons.

In this book I would like to describe how this message of falling down and moving up is, in fact, the most counter-intuitive message in most of the world's religions, including and most especially Christianity. *We grow spiritually much more by doing it wrong than by doing it right.* That might just be the central message of how spiritual growth happens; yet nothing in us wants to believe it. I actually think it is the only workable meaning of any remaining notion of "original sin." There seems to have been a fly in the ointment from the beginning, but the key is recognizing and dealing with the fly rather than needing to throw out the whole ointment!

If there is such a thing as human perfection, it seems to emerge precisely from how we handle the imperfection that is everywhere, especially our own. What a clever place for God to hide holiness, so that only the humble and earnest will find it! A "perfect" person ends up being one who can consciously forgive and include imperfection rather than one who thinks he or she

is totally above and beyond imperfection. It becomes sort of obvious once you say it out loud. In fact, I would say that *the demand for the perfect is the greatest enemy of the good.* Perfection is a mathematical or divine concept, goodness is a beautiful human concept that includes us all.

By denying their pain, avoiding the necessary falling, many have kept themselves from their own spiritual depths – and therefore have been kept from their own spiritual heights. First-half-of-life religion is almost always about various types of purity codes or "thou shalt nots" to keep us up, clear, clean, and together, like good Boy and Girl Scouts. A certain kind of "purity" and self-discipline is also "behovely," at least for a while in the first half of life, as the Jewish Torah brilliantly presents. I was a good Star Scout myself and a Catholic altar boy besides, who rode my bike to serve the 6 A.M. mass when I was merely ten years old. I hope you are as impressed as I was with myself.

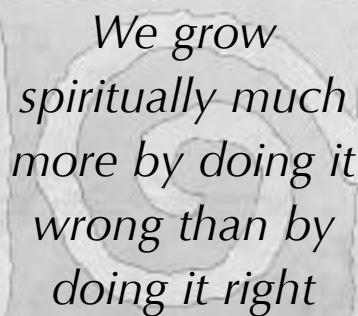
Because none of us desire a downward path to growth through imperfection, seek it, or even suspect it, we have to get the message with the authority of a "divine revelation." So Jesus

makes it into a central axiom: the "last" really do have a head start in moving toward "first," and those who spend too much time trying to be "first" will never get there. Jesus says this clearly in several places and in numerous parables, although those of us still on the first journey just cannot hear this. It has been considered mere religious fluff, as most of Western history has made rather clear. Our resistance to the message is so great that it could be called outright denial, even among

sincere Christians. *The human ego prefers anything, just about anything, to falling or changing or dying.* The ego is that part of you that loves the status quo, even when it is not working. It attaches to past and present, and fears the future.

When you are in the first half of life, you cannot see any kind of failing or dying as even possible, much less as necessary or good. (Those who have never gone up, like the poor and the marginalized, may actually have a spiritual head start, according to Jesus!) But normally we need a few good successes to give us some ego structure and self-confidence, and to get us going. God mercifully hides thoughts of dying from the young, but unfortunately we then hide it from ourselves till the later years finally force it into our consciousness. Ernest Becker said some years ago that it is not love but "the denial of death" that might well make the world go round. What if he is right?

Some have called this principle of going down to go up a "spirituality of imperfection" or "the way of the wound." It has been affirmed in Christianity by St. Therese of Lisieux as her Little Way, by St. Francis as the way of poverty, and by Alcoholics Anonymous as the necessary first step. St. Paul taught this unwelcome message with his enigmatic "It is when I am weak



*We grow
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that I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). Of course, in saying that, he was merely building on what he called the “folly” of the crucifixion of Jesus – a tragic and absurd dying that became resurrection itself.

Like skaters, we move forward by actually moving from side to side. I found this phenomenon to be core and central in my research on male initiation, and now we are finding it mirrored rather clearly in the whole universe, and especially in physics and biology, which is one huge pattern of entropy: constant loss and renewal, death and transformation, the changing of forms and forces. Some even see it in terms of “chaos theory”: the exceptions are the only rule and then they create new rules. Scary, isn’t it?

Denial of the pattern seems to be a kind of practical daily atheism or chosen ignorance among many believers and clergy. Many have opted for the soft religion of easy ego consolations, the human growth model, or the “prosperity Gospel” that has become so common in Western Christianity and in all the worlds we spiritually colonize. We do grow and increase, but by a far different path than the ego would ever imagine. Only the soul knows and understands.

What I hope to do in this small book, without a lot of need to convince anybody, is just to make the sequencing, the tasks, and the direction of the two halves of life clear. Then you will be ready to draw your own conclusions.

That is why I have called it “falling upward.” Those who are ready will see that this message is self-evident: those who have gone “down” are the only ones who understand “up.” Those who have somehow fallen, and fallen well, are the only ones who can go up and not misuse “up.” I want to describe what “up” in the second half of life will look like – and could look like! And, most especially, I want to explore how we transition from one to the other – and how it is not by our own willpower or moral perfection. It will be nothing like what we might have imagined beforehand, and we can’t engineer it by ourselves. It is done unto us.

One more warning, if that is the right word: you will not know for sure that this message is true until you are on the “up” side. You will never imagine it to be true until you have gone through the “down” yourself and come out on the other side in larger form. You must be pressured “from on high,” by fate, circumstance, love, Or God, because nothing in you wants to believe it, or wants to go through it. Falling upward is a “secret” of the soul, known not by thinking about it or proving it but only by risking it – at least once. And by allowing yourself to be led –

at least once. Those who have allowed it know it is true, but only after the fact.

This is probably why Jesus praised faith and trust even more than love. It takes a foundational trust to fall or to fail – and not to fall apart. Faith alone holds you while you stand waiting and hoping and trusting. Then, and only then, will deeper love happen. It’s no surprise at all that in English (and I am told in other languages as well) we speak of “falling” in love. I think it is the only way to get there. None would go freely, if we knew ahead of time what love is going to ask of us. Very human faith lays the utterly needed foundation for the ongoing discovery of love. Have no doubt, though: *great love is always a discovery, a revelation, a wonderful surprise, a falling into “something” much bigger and deeper than is literally beyond us and larger than us.*

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Jesus tells the disciples as they descend from the mountain of transfiguration, “Do not talk about these things until the Human One is risen from the dead” (by which he means until you are on the other side of loss and renewal). If you try to assert wisdom before people have themselves walked it, be prepared for much resistance, denial, push-back, and verbal debate. As the text in Mark continues, “the disciples continued to discuss among themselves what ‘rising from the dead’ might even mean” (Mark 9:9–10). You cannot

imagine a new space fully until you have been taken there. I make this point strongly to help you understand why almost all spiritual teachers tell you to “believe” or “trust” or “hold on.” *They are not just telling you to believe silly or irrational things.* They are telling you to hold on until you can go on the further journey for yourself, and they are telling you that the whole spiritual journey is, in fact, for real – which you cannot possibly know yet.

The language of the first half of life and the language of the second half of life are almost two different vocabularies, known only to those who have been in both of them. The advantage of those on the further journey is that they can still remember and respect the first language and task. *They have transcended but also included all that went before.* In fact, if you cannot include and integrate the wisdom of the first half of life, I doubt if you have moved to the second. Never throw out the baby with the bathwater. People who know how to creatively break the rules also know why the rules were there in the first place. They are not mere iconoclasts or rebels.

I have often thought that this is the symbolic meaning of Moses breaking the first tablets of the law, only to go back up the mountain and have them redone (Exodus 32:19–34, 35) by Yahweh. The second set of tablets emerges after a face-to-

face encounter with God, which changes everything. Our first understanding of law must fail us and disappoint us. Only after breaking the first tablets of the law is Moses a real leader and prophet. Only afterwards does he see God's glory (Exodus 33:18f), and only afterwards does his face "shine" (Exodus 34:29f). It might just be the difference between the two halves of life!

The Dalai Lama said much the same thing: "Learn and obey the rules very well, so you will know how to break them properly." Such discrimination between means and goals is almost the litmus test of whether you are moving in the right direction, and

all the world religions at the mature levels will say similar things. For some reason, religious people tend to confuse the means with the actual goal. In the beginning, you tend to think that God really cares about your exact posture, the exact day of the week for public prayer, the authorship and wordings of your prayers, and other such things. Once your life has become a constant communion, you know that all the techniques, formulas, sacraments, and practices were just a dress rehearsal for the real thing – life itself – which can actually become a constant intentional prayer. Your conscious and loving existence gives glory to God.

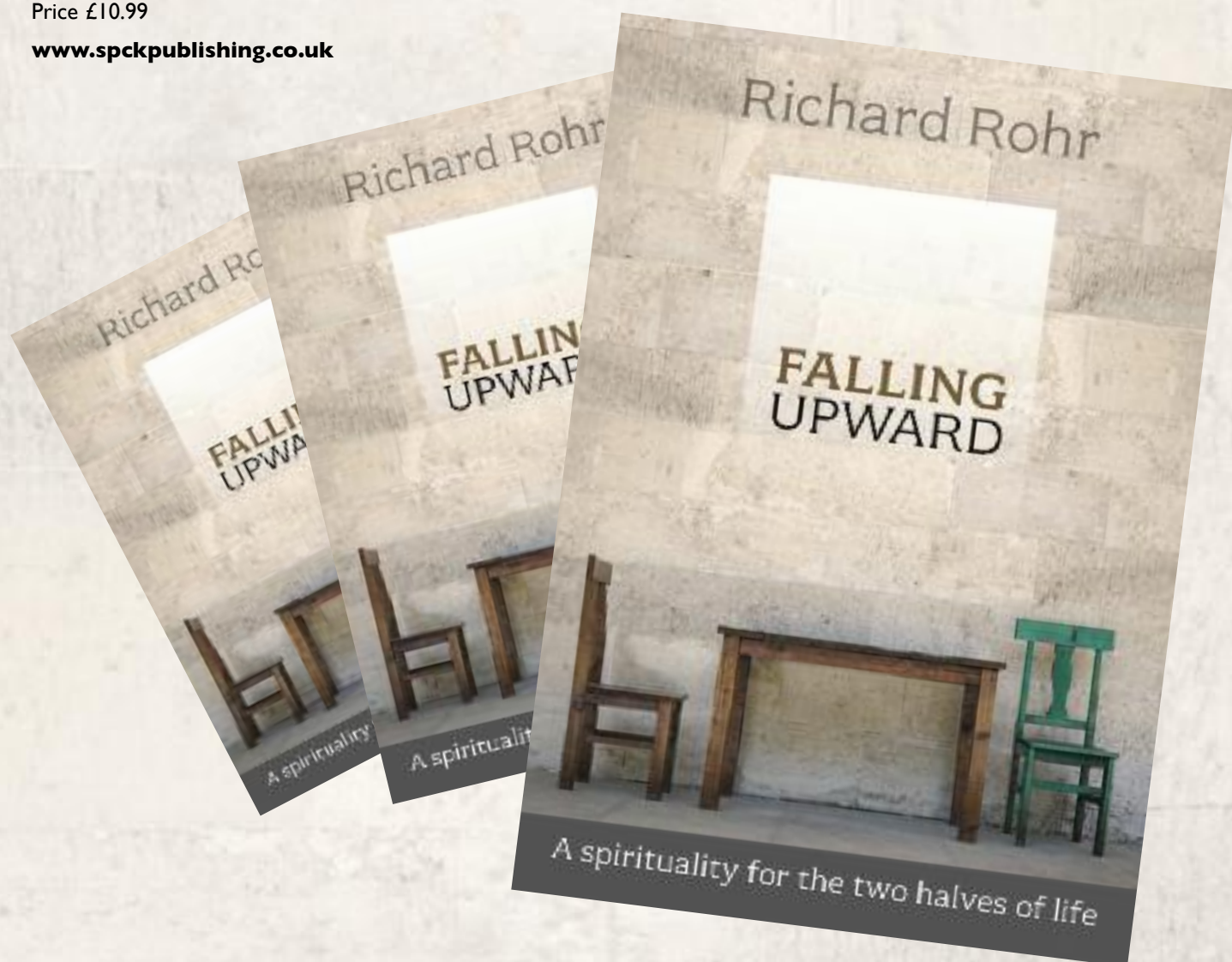
Extract from

FALLING UPWARD by Richard Rohr

ISBN 978 0 281 06891 3

Price £10.99

www.spckpublishing.co.uk



LAURENCE FREEMAN: “The Dalai Lama has been an inspiration to me”



On June 18th Laurence Freeman OSB met with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Manchester. They spoke about the dialogue they will share during the next The World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) Pilgrimage to India in January 2013. They also discussed plans for a new series of *Way of Peace* events which they will co-lead.

You seem to have a very warm friendship with the Dalai Lama and he speaks of you warmly as his friend and spiritual brother. How did this friendship develop? When was your first meeting?

Laurence Freeman: I first met the Dalai Lama in Montreal in 1980, when John Main invited him to visit our new community there after an interfaith service in the Cathedral. I was an early professed monk at that time. The Dalai Lama visited us for midday prayer and meditation followed by lunch. Fr. John had a very positive conversation with him and as he was leaving presented him with a copy of the Rule of St Benedict. The Dalai Lama I think was very impressed and interested by the idea of Christians meditating and teaching meditation from their own tradition. In his book *Towards the True Kinship of Faiths* he describes this meeting and how moved he was by it. He and Fr. John certainly met at a deep personal level.

Some year later, after Fr. John died, I invited his Holiness to lead the John Main Seminar. He accepted in respect of this friendship. Then he asked “What would you like me speak about? I was slightly taken aback and thought quickly and then said “Would you be willing to comment on the Gospel from your Buddhist tradition?”. The Dalai Lama pondered a bit then smiled and replied: “I don’t know a lot about the Gospels but yes, let’s try it”. It was a sign both of his commitment to deep dialogue - seeing from the other’s point of view and letting go of attachment to one’s own - but also of his personal courage and self-confidence.

And that was the beginning of *The Good Heart Seminar* of 1994. The book of that title has become something of a classic on inter religious dialogue. The Dalai Lama often says this is one of his favourite books, because he has so many letters from Christians around the world saying that his commentaries on the Gospel have helped them to reconnect with their own tradition.

How did the idea for The ‘Way of Peace’ arise?

LF: During the *Good Heart Seminar* we decided to extend the dialogue into “The Way of Peace” in which we would explore different forms of dialogue based in meditation. This was a three year program, beginning with a pilgrimage. His Holiness invited us to Bodhgaya, where the Buddha was enlightened. We had several days of dialogue on the meanings of salvation and enlightenment and we began every day meditating under the bodhi tree, Christians and Buddhists together in a beautiful serene way. He was especially welcoming and it was a wonderful experience. He gave us a beautiful *thanka* painted at his request by Tibetan monks depicting the Birth of Jesus. This is in our meditation room at our centre in London where we meditate every day.

The second phase of *The Way of Peace* was a retreat in one of our monasteries in Italy. During it we had more times of meditation together but also some stimulating dialogue sessions on the relationship between images, silence and meditation.

The third phase was the John Main Seminar in 2000, held in Belfast. We wanted to show that if a Buddhist and a Christian monk could be friends then surely Catholics and Protestants could achieve friendship as well. We believed that the friendship that arises from deep dialogue can become a force for healing the wounds of division between people - even very deep, complex and ancient wounds.

I remember one beautiful moment during that seminar in N. Ireland when we went together into a room to meet a group of victims of violence from both sides. The mood was very tense and unfriendly; there was a very cold atmosphere as we walked in. The Dalai Lama immediately registered the emotional mood, skipped the formal introductions and went straight into dialogue beginning by telling his own story and his attitude towards the people who had occupied his country. By the end of the session, the mood had change dramatically and there was a wonderful spirit of self-discovery and openness to each other. It was actually in that meeting that he met Richard Moore, who he admired very much as an example of the human capacity for forgiveness. So over the years, and especially through these dialogues, my respect and very warm affection for the Dalai Lama have grown and deepened and enriched me.

Tell us about your last meeting in the UK...

LF: Recently I met him during his visit to the UK. We caught up with each other's news and then we discussed further dialogues on the horizon.

The first of these will be the dialogue that we will hold in India, in Sarnath, where the Buddha made the first turning of the wheel of Dharma. That will be January in 2013. It will take place during our WCCM pilgrimage to India.

We also discussed a new *Way of Peace* series that will focus on the contemporary issues and problems that have come to the foreground of modern life in recent years, especially our contemporary crisis, since the first *Way of Peace*. So we will announce more information about that 3-year programme soon.

Today, what does the Dalai Lama represent for you?

LF: The Dalai Lama has been an inspiration to me. I would even say a Christ-like figure. He has dealt with great personal loss and suffering. And he has become a human being with boundless compassion and also infectious joy. He teaches by example as well as by words. He can communicate with everyone in simple, informal ways from his own direct experience, without having to use jargon or complex ideas. So he is a wonderful witness, I think, to every human being on the planet of the human capacity to rise above our isolation and even our worst suffering. He reminds people of the full capacity of human consciousness. In my dialogues with him I have been always struck by the fact that the similarities and the differences in our experience and in our approaches are equally important.

This coincides with the Dalai Lama's opinion, that we must never underestimate the importance of the differences that are highlighted in the course of dialogue.

My own feeling is that there is a paradox here. We enter into the deepest sympathy and even deepest union of experience *through the differences* even more than through our similarities. So the Dalai Lama has enriched my Christian faith in a surprising and creative way. He has also spoken about how his respect for, and sympathy for, the Christian tradition and Christian faith has been enriched by the contact that he had with our Community and of course with many other Christian groups. I have no doubt, strange though it may sound, that he has enhanced and deepened my Christian faith.

So it is always a great joy to meet with him. It refreshes my optimism for the work of our own community - The World Community for Christian Meditation - especially our recently launched *Meditatio* outreach which is bringing the spiritual fruits of meditation to the secular world - and also deepening the much needed spiritual renewal of the Church. I travel a lot as the Dalai Lama does too. Sometimes our paths cross and that is a great happiness; but even in the times between our meetings I feel very connected to him as a fellow monk, a meditator and, as simply as that very rare phenomenon - a peaceful, joyful and normal human being!

I and our community look forward very much to the January meeting in Sarnath and the next *Way of Peace* and we keep His Holiness and his extraordinary work for the contemporary world in our prayer always.

**Interview & photographs by
Leonardo Corrêa WCCM**



Windows of Blessings

Art has become a spiritual practise for me in many different ways over recent years. As a child I enjoyed settling down to make pictures, quickly becoming engrossed in the activity, and loving the materials I was working with.

Some years later I became a Quaker, and soon after that I was fortunate to encounter the 'Appleseed' ministry of Chris Cook and Brenda Healesⁱ, which opened up new insights and a range of possibilities.

'Appleseed' workshops combine intellectual input – often a short talk on a spiritual or philosophical theme – with an art-based activity to reflect mindfully on what has been said. These exercises are undertaken in a spirit of worship, in the silent Quaker tradition, and the response activities always involve an element of 'letting go' of control, while still being prayerfully focused: letting God take charge. Allowing my hands to be led in this way, while maintaining prayerful or mindful attention has enabled me to address a variety of situations at a spiritual level. The resulting images have become windows for the spirit, and reminders, that help me stay spiritually grounded in everyday life.

Sometimes the Appleseed exercises have stood by themselves; but when I have wanted to spend a longer time reflecting on something that is happening in my life, or in the world - or on something I have read - then a series of artworks have developed. Starting points have ranged from wanting to explore the nature of worship, to the imminent invasion of Iraq; from the beauty of a landscape, to sorrow at the destruction wrought on nature by humanity; from the pain of a difficult personal relationship to joy at being upheld by a deep love.

Often, the process of making these images changes the way I feel and think. I may come to new insights through studying and developing a series of images, and often I find myself guided and empowered to take a step in a new direction. It may be a small step, but it usually feels adventurous to me, and small healing changes have often resulted.

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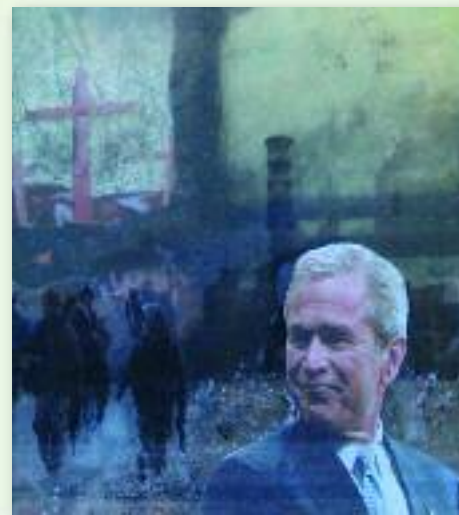


Wilderness path Ink on canvas

ⁱ Seeding the Spirit: the Appleseed Workbook by Chris Cook and Brenda Heales, 2001, available from the Quaker Centre, Friends House, 173 - 177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ www.quaker.org.uk/shop



Dust to Dust – detail
Artist's book detail: handmade paper



Crucifixion of the Earth
Reflection on the invasion of Iraq. Mixed media

Similarly, the media I use has been changing. I may start to work on a theme in one medium, but the work may develop in a new direction, using new materials. It feels as though the materials, as well as the subject matter, are part of the prayer, and I increasingly use 'found' objects and natural materials in my work, or make prints directly from them. In recent years I have turned to making paper as an art form in itself, including plant or mineral material, also recycling paper from old prayer or hymn books; I love the idea that these old prayers are coming to life in new forms. I have gone on to incorporate some of this paper into triptychs or artists' books, which can be used for personal prayer or reflection.

Quakerism is strongly rooted in Protestant Christianity and it is also open to new Light from any source. We have little by way of visual imagery, partly as a result of our historic origins, and partly due to the importance we attach to simplicity. My mindful making has helped me to explore and give form to some of my spiritual experiences and insights, and has strengthened me on my journey, providing gentle visual reminders of God's presence. If some of the things I have made can become windows to help others be more in touch with their deepest values and truths, then that is a great blessing.



"Now we see as through a glass darkly; then, face to face".
Entrance to Wandsworth Quaker Meeting House.
Oil on Canvas



Footprints Silkscreen monoprint

Linda Murgatroyd

Linda is a member of Wandsworth Quaker Meeting and a workshop facilitator and Secretary of the Art and Spirituality Network.

www.artandspirituality.net

<http://lindamurgatroyd.wordpress.com>

Photograph by Fiona Wells Martin



Do not believe just because wise men say so.

Do not believe just because it has always been that way.

Do not believe just because others may believe so.

Examine and -- experience yourself!

Kalama Sutra, The Buddha