



ISSUE 18

# faith

## INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

*If there is a  
heaven on earth  
it is here, it is here, it is here*



**FOCUS**

**George Alagiah: The Homecoming**

**SPIRITUAL INSIGHT**

**Elizabeth Harris: The Buddha Beckons**

**REFLECTION**

**Jonathan Wittenberg: Service of Life**

...Balanced precariously between the encroaching jungle and the pull of gravity, the temples succumbed to age and isolation...



Cited: Angkor Wat: Time, Space and Kingship  
by: Eleanor Mannikka 1996 Hawaii University Press

Photo: Fiona Wells Martin

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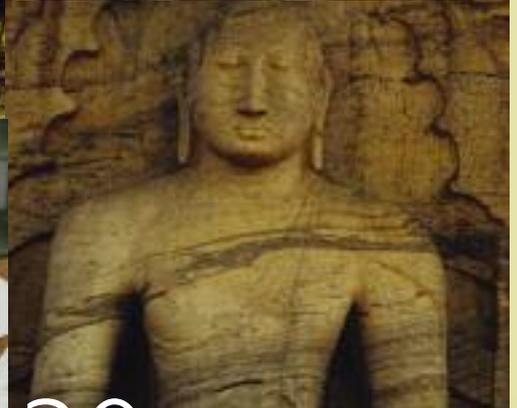
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# editorial

Out of concern for the future of the Burmese people I am dedicating this editorial to the monks and nuns of Burma who recently, with great courage, stepped out of their Sanghas to march in peaceful protest against the injustices inflicted on the population by the unelected military junta. Many of us will have been moved at the images projected across the world by protesters, largely through the use of their mobile phones and the internet. The immediacy of these images gave us a moving insight into the unfolding of events – from the first heartening scene of the monks marching beside the laity, to the devastating spectacle of brutal beatings inflicted by armed guards.



As a deeply Buddhist country the lay people of Burma would have considered it an act of devotion to feed and clothe the ordained monks, and the nuns too, whatever their circumstances, and so they could have safely remained detached from the situation. They chose to align themselves with the people in their hardship and in so doing they demonstrated an enlightened social consciousness and a compassion for their people's suffering – that too of the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under some form of detention for over 11 years. The media did true justice to the bravery of the Burmese people, giving great coverage to daily events and drawing the situation to the attention of the United Nations. But now the protesters have been forced off the streets by the regime, and all forms of communication with the outside world have been curtailed. The people's right to free speech has been forcibly removed, and Burma has virtually dropped off our radar. Yet the people of that land – lay and ordained – men, women and children, are still suffering impoverishment and many are imprisoned because of the protest. Out of sight must not mean out of mind! The monks and the nuns, and all the people of Burma, need the world to keep them in their sights, for fear they will suffocate under the weight of oppression imposed by a hardline regime that prefers to operate away from the wider public gaze – and within walls of silence.

## Heather Wells

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faith  
INITIATIVE

[www.faithinitiative.co.uk](http://www.faithinitiative.co.uk)

**Initiative Interfaith Trust**  
**Registered Charity No. 1113345**

**Trustees:** Heather Wells, Lorna Douglas,  
Jonathan Lockhart

### **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** **Editorial team –**

**Editor:** Heather Wells

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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 Heather Wells, PO Box 110, Lancaster LA2 6GN  
Email: [hf\\_wells@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:hf_wells@yahoo.co.uk)

### **Issue 19 Themes:**

- Food & Faith
- Marriage Rituals

**Front cover: Image:** Children enacting Krishna story. With thanks to Bhaktivedanta Manor. **Text:** An inscription on the wall of a 16th Century Mughal garden  
**Background Design:** Front & Back Cover: With thanks to Carol Hamby

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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 & Fulfillment*  
Laura J. Watts (2002) Pub. Hermes House,  
London ISBN 184308 973 7

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



# the DIGNITY of difference

In 2002 the Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks published a highly acclaimed book called *The Dignity of Difference* in which he suggested that: 'we need to search – each faith in its own way – for a way of living with, and acknowledging the integrity of those who are not of our faith'. 'Can we', he asked 'make space for difference? Can we hear the voice of God in a language, a sensibility, a culture not our own? Can we see the presence of God in the face of a stranger?'<sup>1</sup>

Often the discourse of inter faith relations is to set aside differences, to emphasise our common humanity, to focus on similarities and commonalities and yet, the Chief Rabbi suggests, it is our differences that make us unique and it is by respecting these differences that a universalism which he thinks can quickly deteriorate into tribalism can be overcome.

But, are we happy with difference? Today we hear a lot from Government about social cohesion, integration, establishing a sense of Britishness but I often wonder what exactly is meant by this. Are the advocates of social cohesion hoping for a peaceful existence in which individuals will simply conform to the prevailing values of society rather than helping people learn how to cope with difference and find a way of living together and contributing constructively to society? Is Britishness an idea which suggests that in spite of our different cultural backgrounds, different ethnicities and different faiths there is an underlying cultural expression to which we can all subscribe and which will do away with conflict and tension in society? Do these ideas betray a fear of diversity? In spite of all our talk of individuality and plurality our society, like all institutions, seems to favour conformity.

But what a dull world it would be if we were all the same. This is as true of religion as it is of any other aspect of life. Today inter faith relations have become mainstream and inter faith groups are growing. People are engaging in inter faith for a variety of reasons – for some it is a desire to engage with those of different faiths, for others it is to represent their own faith and tradition and safeguard its place in a secular society, for others it is simply politically correct to do so and they don't want to be left out of the loop. Not all the people involved in inter faith are completely happy within it. Inter faith can be challenging to people of faith.

Because truth lies at the heart of religion there is sometimes a fear that someone else's truth can undermine my truth. If someone else's way is a valid way to human wholeness and liberation does it invalidate my way? If I think my way is the true way is it my duty to try to win people over to my way? Can I truly respect the truth and the way of others and rejoice that their way is different from mine? For me the answer is a resounding yes and I can respond in the affirmative because of my experience of people of different faiths.

what I  
thought  
was truth  
was in  
fact faith

Inter Faith has been for me a journey into the world of others and for me this has been a sacred journey. It all began when I went to study at Lancaster University many moons ago and for the first time in my life studied faiths other than my own and, more importantly, met people of faiths other than my own. This experience was a turning point in my life, so much so that I think of my life in terms of pre-Lancaster and post-Lancaster.

What challenged me was the realization that what I thought was truth was in fact faith and that having grown up in a believing community I knew very little of other Christian denominations never mind other faiths. For me it was a shock and a challenge to realize that others had their versions of the truth and were committed to a particular way which was obviously fruitful and rewarding for them. What was I to do with my version of reality and faith? I did not abandon it but I was challenged to rethink it for myself and see it in the light of others. I realized that no matter how rich my religious upbringing had been I was living in a world with a limited perspective and was blind to the reality of faith that was all around me. I knew I did not want to go back to that world. Not that I changed my faith or left my religious community but I got to know other believers and other paths in such a way that I have been enriched by the experience.

Returning from university I got a job teaching world religions but more importantly I joined what in Glasgow was called the Sharing of Faiths. This was the first inter faith group in Scotland, although we did not talk in terms of inter faith all those years ago, and it was organised from a place in the west end of Glasgow called the International Flat – a wonderful space for hospitality, friendship, conversation and food.

The flat was the home and workplace of a remarkable woman who was the pioneer of inter faith work in Scotland, a woman called Stella Reekie.

Stella's own story had begun near Gravesend where she was born in 1922, but perhaps the most formative moment in her life was when, as a young nurse, she assisted in the liberation of Belsen and so saw for herself the horror that hatred, prejudice and suspicion can result in. Stella's commitment to what we would now call inter faith relations came after she had worked as a missionary in Pakistan and returned to Glasgow in the late 1960s to work as a community worker with the newly arrived Asian community. Stella's home became an international centre from which Stella carried out her work, using her knowledge of Urdu to help people find homes, seek medical help and cope with a host of other social problems.

Stella attracted people to the Flat, many of whom came to seek a space where they would always be welcomed and to take part in the many activities that took place there, including the regular Glasgow Sharing of Faiths meetings. People of all faiths crowded into the Flat to learn about one another's faith but more importantly to establish firm friendships which have lasted until the present day. Stella died twenty five years ago but recently ninety of her friends met to remember Stella and the work of the Flat. It was a wonderful evening characterized by laughter, friendship and hospitality – qualities that Stella had in abundance and which I think are necessary for inter faith engagement.

Friendship means meeting the other, reaching out to the other, sharing time with the other but to do this we first have to get out of our own closed world. Friendship means dealing with the 'otherness' of the other. Often in relationships we are looking for what is like us in the other but in friendship we can enjoy the difference, which means having fun, appreciating and taking pleasure in difference. The firm friendships that inter faith can engender can go a long way towards overcoming our deep collective memories of hurt and suspicion. Friendship is a way to heal our wounded memories. It is also a platform which allows us to face the difficult questions and to discuss our disagreements in an atmosphere of trust and confidence and it is important that inter faith relations face up to these questions.

Stella Jane Reekie was a true star as her name suggests. Because of her influence the International Flat in Glasgow became a place of encounter where people rejoiced in their differences and built strong and lasting friendships. Twenty five years after her death Stella's influence is still felt and the seeds that she has sown are now beginning to bear fruit. She can be an inspiration to everyone of us to believe that the small efforts we make to extend the hand of friendship can have lasting and enduring effects.

## GLASGOW SHARING OF FAITHS PRAYER

Almighty, ever-living God, Lord of the universe and Lord of our lives, we praise you. You have created us to be your people drawn from the all the rich variety of the world's families and the world's faiths.

We confess that we are prisoners of prejudice, bound by the chains of yesterday's wrongs and tomorrow's fears. We pray that You will forgive the wrong that we have done and set us free from our fear of one another, free to celebrate our beliefs and our liberty as one universal family under God.

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sacks: *The Dignity of Difference*, Continuum 2003 p.5

# Breaking out of the 'agnostic box'

Young Voices

I came to Iona Inter faith week as an agnostic which probably sounds a little strange since without a faith it would appear pretty impossible for one to engage in a process of 'inter-faithing'. However I was beginning to feel the 'agnostic box' was getting a bit confined, and as a student of Religion and avid reader on all things spiritual, I realised it was time for me to get questioning again.

So after what certainly felt like a pilgrimage, I arrived in beautiful Iona to great home-cooked food, friendly welcomes and discussions of anticipation for the week ahead. As we strolled to our first evening service I remember seeing the most distinctive rainbow enshrining the Abbey and everyone being so quick to say what a good omen it was for our week.

Every morning the group held a meditation from a different faith perspective so we progressively began to learn more about each other - although the emphasis was not for us to stand as representatives of our separate faiths but to connect with each other through our personal spiritual journeys. As young people we discovered how we had reached similar questions about ourselves as emerging spiritual and moral beings, and it was great to have the space to discuss and share these concerns and beliefs together. Here faith became not a barrier but an asset to communication; a tool to reinforce our own spiritual exploration and we all felt able to share without compromising our distinctive beliefs.

One of our many activities was to plan and hold an Inter faith Service in the Abbey for the whole community, this was a great opportunity to make sure all our individual voices were heard. We began by identifying our common concerns as socially and environmentally aware people and realised that our spirituality - being inextricably bound to our place and responsibilities to the world and its inhabitants - had great implications on our humanity. This shared understanding led us to highlight three main issues we hoped to commit to through our lives and communicate to others through the service, these were: care for our world, a commitment to peace and justice and a quest for continued learning and openness in our own spiritual journeys. The audience were invited to make a symbolic expression of their commitment to these concerns as well as learning more about individual faiths through personal readings, scripture and song.

I felt very moved by the collective worship, though not in



the sort of hysterical 'drunk on the atmosphere' scenario I have become so sceptical of, but in the quiet intuitive way one feels when suddenly perceiving truth in everything being spoken, drummed, sung and lived. I guess it is like discovering a deeper and more complete version of yourself interconnected to everyone and everything around you and daring to accept it.

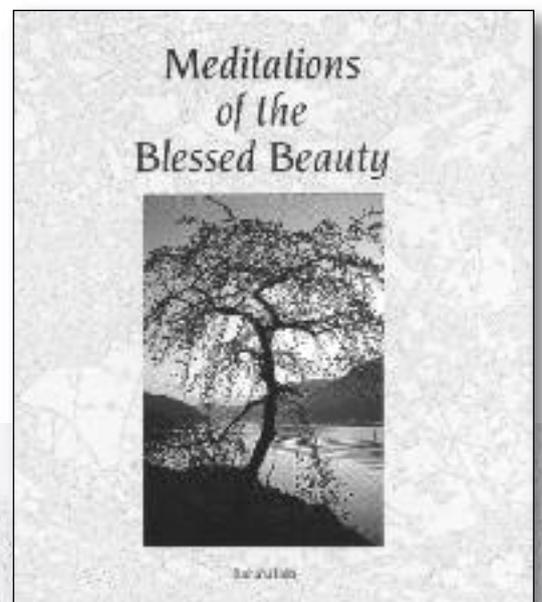
my agnostic label  
had become as  
much a safe  
harbour as  
other's faiths had  
appeared to me

I began to realise that through my purely intellectual study of religion I had only really focused on the surface detail, the physical manifestation of faith. I had never really penetrated the human experience of the spiritual since it had always remained something separate and incomprehensible. Also I became aware that my agnostic label had become as much a safe harbour as other's faiths had appeared to me; after all if I 'don't know' no one can prove me wrong. Through my life I've met so many people who identify themselves as agnostic yet at the same time adopt a strong anti-religious stance and are unwilling to learn from other's realisations. This week provided a great antidote to such attitudes, with people of different faiths entering the unknowing together, daring to question their beliefs and remaining open to other people and their approaches.

Such dialogues have brought me to believe that Inter faith work, done correctly, could heal many of the social divisions between people of all backgrounds and age groups, not in a clichéd 'God loves you all' sense (however true that may be!), but through coming to terms with the often starkness of our differences and realising that behind all the illusions we are human beings facing similar dilemmas and inhabiting the same fragile world.

Tear asunder with the hand of thy transcendent power, O my Lord, the veil of vain imaginings, that they who are wholly devoted to Thee may see Thee seated on the throne of thy majesty, and the eyes of such as adore Thy unity may rejoice at the splendours of the glory of Thy face. The doors of hope have been shut against the hearts that long for Thee, O my Lord!

Their keys are in Thy hands; open them by the power of Thy might and Thy sovereignty. Potent art Thou to do as Thou pleasest. Thou art, verily, the Almighty.  
the Beneficent.



*Meditations of the Blessed Beauty*: Extract from the writings of Bahá'u'llah translated from the original Arabic & Persian.  
Selected by Gordon J Kerr & George M Ballentyne.  
Publishers: Nightingale Books/Bahai Publishing Trust (1992) Image © Mark Sadan

# Subtle Mind **VS** Unsubtle Methods

## - WHICH WILL RULE IN MODERN CHINA?

**H**ow could we fail to be intrigued by the heading in The Times at the beginning of August: 'China tells living Buddhas to obtain permission before they reincarnate'.

The news story was reporting on a new 14-part Regulation issued by the State Administration for Religious Affairs in China which limits the areas of the country in which reincarnated lamas may be sought, and prevents anyone outside China from taking part in the process of seeking and recognising a 'living Buddha'. From the beginning of September selection of candidates has been controlled by the state authorities.

Of course we can read between the lines and recognise the political nature of this strategy. The invasion of Tibet by China - *is it really almost fifty years ago, already!* - forced the spiritual and political leader of that country into exile, and since then His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet has been working tirelessly to obtain peaceful reconciliation for his people and the reinstatement of their cultural heritage.

Unfortunately the Chinese leaders are suspicious of his motives and interpret all his actions as attempts to undermine the authority of the state. This latest set of regulations then, from the Chinese authorities' point of view, is simply a means of preventing the Dalai Lama from influencing the selection of powerful religious leaders from his exile in India. In the fullness of time they will also, conveniently, allow the state to choose his successor itself so that it can control the 'troublesome' Tibetans within its borders once and for all.

Perhaps it is easy for us to scorn communist leaders' attempts to make use of people's beliefs in order to control them, but, before we so easily pass judgement on others, we should possibly examine our own attitudes and assess whether we too have any traces of arrogance, intolerance and even a little condescension within our own mind towards other people's conceptual frameworks for deriving meaning from life.

What do we really think of a set of beliefs that work on the principle of reincarnated religious authority? What qualities do we consider might be those of a 'living Buddha' and on what basis should it be decided who might be one? How can we begin to answer these questions from within a different religious tradition or from a secularist viewpoint. Surely, these questions may only be answered using the concepts that belong to the same

tradition from which the questions originate?

The Great Path of Mahayana Buddhism, which the Tibetan culture is founded upon, is based on developing the motivation of altruism. Wanting to bring happiness, and the causes of happiness, to all beings. Through this path the mind is trained to gradually lose its sense of separateness and isolation and to become connected to all beings through a realisation of the wisdom of selflessness.

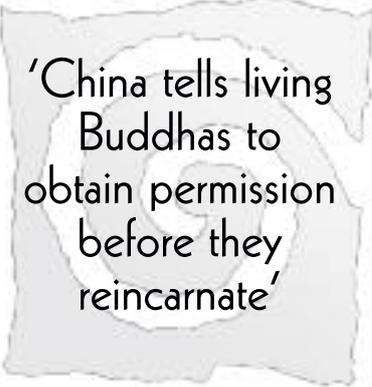
In all forms of Buddhism, mind is understood as having many aspects, which basically means that we can categorise our

understanding of what mind is in different ways. One aspect, known as the conceptual mind, has both subtle and gross layers. Thoughts and feelings can arise in both of these. Our body is connected at this gross layer of conceptual mind, so that perceptions arising within our ears, for example, can be experienced as the concepts 'sound', 'melody' and 'pitch'. Over many years of childhood we learn to distinguish and categorise different mental constructs arising from our ear

consciousness and learn to interpret them as having a source 'external' to our 'self'. In this way our concepts develop dependent on our cultural interpretations and language.

The gross layer of the conceptual mind has a two-way communication with our body so that thoughts and feelings can give rise to effects at a physical level. We may feel sad so the tear glands of our eyes begin to function and we reach for a tissue from the bedside table. Alternatively we may wish to type a letter 'l' so our finger moves to the appropriate symbol on the keyboard of our computer.

The subtle layer of the conceptual mind is active regardless of bodily perceptions. Sometimes memories can be triggered by sounds or smells but other times they arise seemingly without any immediate external influence. Dreams, as Dr. Freud proposed, can be linked to recently observed perceptions, but modern psychology no longer attempts to limit the dreamer's sub-conscious in this way. Nowadays it is generally accepted that mental images, awake or asleep, can arise independently of immediately obvious external stimuli. Putting it another way, thoughts and feelings can appear to have a life of their own, but Buddhism regards the causes for their arising to be held deep within the subtle conceptual mind.



'China tells living Buddhas to obtain permission before they reincarnate'

It is at the boundaries between the subtle and the gross layers of conceptual mind that separation occurs at the moment of death, according to the Tibetan system of understanding.

Those who have advanced to a high level along the path of Mahayana Buddhism are said to be able to control the subtle mind in its journey beyond death and can, therefore, choose the most suitable vehicle for the continuation of their work to bring happiness to all beings.

A 'reincarnated Lama', known as a tulku, achieves greatness in the Mahayana tradition, therefore, by continuing the work begun by their predecessors in the stream of consciousness we may think of as 'previous lives'. It would be wrong to conceive of these lives as the same person living again, however. It is the subtle mind that appears in a continuum, not the gross mind that is very much connected with the brain, the body and the ego and which dies with the body. What continues, though, are the remnants of previous mental causes that have not reached fruition in their mental effects. These can only ripen when conditions are right, just as seeds lie dormant under the earth until the right season and the right rains come. What also continue are the accumulations of merit and wisdom. These are like the bank accounts of spiritual development, and without understanding these one cannot appreciate why it is so vital for tulkus, or 'living Buddhas', to be identified so carefully.

One Lama (out of respect for the humility of whom we preserve his anonymity) now leads a worldwide following of spiritual practitioners in over 130 centres in 43 countries, with a stable base of over 3,500 western practitioners committed to following a graduated seven year programme of authentic Tibetan Buddhist study and practice. In a recent teaching he attributed this success not only to the wisdom and compassion of his own teachers, and his own devotion to following their instructions, but also to the tremendous merit passed down to him from his predecessors, who were renowned for their qualities of unlimited generosity and diligent endeavour.

The Tibetan lineage of living masters is unique in this respect. Not only are the master's teachings and realisations passed down

to the disciple in a very direct way, but also there is a living inheritance of the fruits of their predecessor's labour for the disciple. Enlightened qualities such as generosity, diligence, perseverance and patience are preserved within the subtle conceptual mind to be made manifest once again in a new body and a new gross conceptual mind.

It is this that the Tibetan culture respects in its religious leaders. They are the example for all to follow. They show what spiritual development is possible for human beings to attain. They do not achieve this authority simply by being appointed to it or by showing allegiance to a political leader or state. They may gain authority initially from a respect for their spiritual inheritance, but that respect is developed and increased as the person manifests those enlightened qualities for themselves.

Anyone being chosen by the Chinese government as a 'living Buddha', therefore, must be prepared for the expectations that they inherit from their predecessors, and they must also be prepared to devote themselves to a living master, who themselves learned from their predecessor, in order to reawaken the enlightened qualities of their subtle mind and train their gross minds that are now part and parcel of a new body. This leap-frogging of master and disciple has maintained a living tradition of unbroken and highest realisation for hundreds of years in Tibet, and is now threatened by the insensitivity and ignorance of the Chinese leaders.

The arrogance of humans who consider that they have sufficient knowledge to be able to judge what is best for other people without even taking the trouble to try to understand their needs in relation to their way of life continues to reveal itself throughout the world of politics. Intolerance towards other traditions from a position that seeks only to promote its own values and beliefs remains as the unstable ground across which society stumbles, on its way towards more conflict and less peace of mind.

May we all learn to develop understanding for each other's chosen way of life and may we all choose to find ways of life that promote understanding between us.



# Forever Pilgrim

**I am boundless – such is your bounty.  
Stripped bare; then again,  
You replenish me with a new life!**

**Through many a mountain high,  
And countless rivers deep,  
You have cradled this tiny flute;  
Playing freely many a tone and tempo -  
O, such highs and lows, who will ever know?**

**I am boundless – such is your bounty.  
Enfeebled and fortified – I get a new lease of life!**

**Your tender touch,  
And I turn to gold!  
My brimming heart bursts forth  
In a happy profusion;  
Copious notes ride on rolling waves.**

**I am boundless – such is your bounty.  
Deflated and elevated – I am revived anew!**

**In just one handful, by night and day  
You invigorate me with endless gifts.  
But the dearth is yet to be filled!  
For all the epoch more,  
I'll keep coming back for evermore.**

**I am boundless – such is your bounty.**

From Tagore's Devotional Song 'Little Flute'  
'Aamare Toomi Ashesh Korecho, Eamoni Leela Tobo'

Translated text © Shiban Akbar  
[www.communication-essentials.co.uk](http://www.communication-essentials.co.uk)

# PILGRIMAGE OF THE *Heart*

A few years ago I was visiting Sissinghurst Garden the home of Vita Sackville West and her husband Sir Harold Nicholson. I still vividly recall how fine the weather was on that summer's afternoon as I slowly walked around the garden taking in the delightful vistas, summer borders and delicate fragrances of blooms that aroused my senses. During a welcomed rest, sitting on a bench seat, I became engaged in conversation with a pleasant, elderly New Zealander. She told me that ever since she was a small girl growing up in Auckland she had been devotedly reading about Sissinghurst through the numerous and colourful writings of Vita Sackville West and that this garden, buried in the depths of the Kentish countryside, had come to slowly fill a very special part in her imaginative life. Approaching her more mature years she started to feel a deep-seated desire to visit Sissinghurst before it was too late. The afternoon soon drifted on and I had to bid my farewell to her. But I've never forgotten our encounter and what she had said to me. To this very day I know that I had learnt a valuable lesson there, sitting on a bench seat, talking to a stranger who had made a pilgrimage from the other side of the world to visit a garden.

Pilgrimages can find expression in many different forms - journeying to consecrated cathedrals, churches, temples and shrines; visiting ancient monuments and sites. Trekking to find sacred mountains, rivers and lakes and, for me, visiting formal, English gardens. Provided they touch an authentic, inner need within us, an awakening of our spiritual and aesthetic sensibilities, then the form they take makes little difference - it's the experience that counts.

Soon after my journey to Sissinghurst I made a firm resolve to visit Burnt Norton, the garden in Gloucestershire which features in *The Four Quartets*, T S Eliot's seminal work.

**" ....Time past and time future  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always  
present."**

The *Quartets* made a profound and lasting impact on me when I read them for the first time. Eliot's penetrating insights - expressed through an intricate rich tapestry of poetic imagery - just seemed to open me up to a richer, deeper level of spiritual understanding. Now I had decided to visit Burnt Norton as a form of pilgrimage, homage to Eliot's revealing light of truth and beauty; suffice to say that it had great significance for me. Again, like my visit to Sissinghurst, the day was set during a particularly fine period of summer weather which heightened my feelings and experience. I had taken with me a rose bush to offer as a gift for the garden and I was very pleased to receive a charming letter, a few weeks later, from the owner to say how delighted he was to receive the rose, adding that it would: "....adorn the rose garden and give so much pleasure..."

Eliot visited Burnt Norton in the summer of 1934 and was overwhelmed, at the time, by stirrings of deep, spiritual feelings and emotions which, it is thought, culminated in a heightened mystical experience for him in the rose garden by the main house. Now my rose grows there sending its roots deep into the very soil that must have felt Eliot's spiritual awakening:

**" ....Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not  
take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose - garden. My words echo  
Thus, in your mind. "**

Since my visits to Sissinghurst and Burnt Norton I have made many regular 'pilgrimages' to other gardens that have had such significance for me - from Bodnant in North Wales to Anglesey Abbey in Cambridgeshire, from Levens Hall in the Lake District to Sheffield Park in Sussex. And my experience throughout this time has forcibly reinforced a long held conviction that a garden could become a fine spiritual / aesthetic experience without equal.

## GARDENING AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Gardens also provide us with an opportunity to actively engage in work that can contribute considerably to the development of our spiritual practice.

Saint Francis of Assisi was working once in the full blaze of a summer's afternoon sun in his treasured Umbrian garden. Watching him for a while, a novice plucked up courage to ask what he would do if this was the last day of his life. Saint Francis looked up, gazed into the eyes of the novice and replied: "Carry on hoeing". I think I understand something of what he meant. For at the very heart of mindfully practiced gardening lies a peace, serenity and tranquility which could be considered a form of meditation; a prayer in action which lifts us from our everyday preoccupations and worries and gently leads us into a special presence of being. A sacred space where we can lose ourselves (our narrowly defined identities) in a much larger, interconnected world of unity and oneness. The oneness of a cosmic life force that is manifest in all living things. Digging, hoeing, planting, pruning, watering and harvesting are all aspects of an active participation in nature's miraculous and mysterious process of creativity. A dynamic, awesome process of which we are all an intricate part.

At special times, in supreme moments of relaxed spaciousness our gardening work may very well open us up to the spiritual insights that are very much present in nature. In the garden, at the water's edge, in the ploughed field, in the depths of the woodlands, insights are ever present for us to recognize and attend to for further spiritual inquiry and growth. Every flower, leaf and blade of grass is a gift to us, a spiritual messenger that offers us awakening in every moment if we are made ready to receive it.

**"And every stone and every star a  
tongue,  
And every gale of wind a curious song.  
The Heavens were an oracle, and spoke  
Divinity: the Earth did undertake  
The office of a priest; and I being dumb  
(Nothing besides was dumb)  
all things did come  
With voices and instructions . . . "**

Thomas Traherne

## LIFE AS A PILGRIMAGE

In one sense a pilgrimage is not just a journey undertaken to pay homage to a place deemed 'sacred' or 'holy', it can encompass something much broader than this. For pilgrimage can be considered more of a spiritual experience rather than a place we visit, more attitudinal than geographical. Further, we could say that life itself, with all its creative choices of direction and diversions, is a pilgrimage. A constantly stretching process that takes us away on a journey confronting challenges, tests and trials that will shape our lives to make them much more meaningful and purposeful.

In essence, at the very core of pilgrimage lies the opportunity to venture forward on an inner journey that will take us into our very depths to reveal who we are and our place within the universe. But we must be prepared to surrender to that journey, to let go of our old, preconceived thoughts and opinions in order to allow the new to enter. Then, after the quest is honoured we are exposed to profound appreciation, reconciliation and acceptance - a homecoming to our true self, the hidden self we have always been.

# Transforming hearts

My heart leaped with joy at returning to the Middle East once more! I had not been there for two years, when I made a trip back to Lebanon with my daughter and visited all the long-forgotten sites. That particular trip had been a nostalgic visit for us both, for we wanted to return to the village where we had lived before the civil war broke out. When we lived in Lebanon, we had driven to Damascus briefly during the 70's as tourists. This trip to Damascus was going to be very different. We were visiting Sheikh Nazim in this most holy city. We had not seen him since November 1999 and we were looking forward very much to being with him once more in his beloved Sham.

We were to stay at the house of Sheikh Anwar and his family who were to be our hosts during our stay in Damascus. The first night Sheikh Anwar's wife invited me to stay in their house. It was late at night by the time we arrived: "I don't want to trouble you and cause you extra work" I said politely. She looked bewildered and perplexed, "If I don't work to serve you, then what work should I do?" she asked in astonishment. Tears came to my eyes as I remembered the many years of generous hospitality which I had received in the Muslim world, and particularly in Sheikh Nazim's house. "At your service", "for your pleasure" – one hears these phrases constantly. This real desire to serve which comes from the heart is something intrinsic to the Muslim world. It is a totally different form of politeness to the standard good manners which we are used to in the West.

The next day I was invited to join the other *mureeds*<sup>1</sup> in the *harem*. To my great surprise when I walked into the kitchen, who should I see but a sister from Orgiva near Granada and her youngest daughter, whom I had not seen for about eight years. The delightful part about belonging to a Sufi order is that one constantly meets up with people again in different places, but always under the same circumstances. We come together for the purpose of worshipping Allah Almighty and association with the Sheikh, but it is an added joy to catch up with friends and share

news of children, marriages, grandchildren and so on.

Life in the *harem* made a pleasant change. We only saw our husbands when we went to the *maqam* or in the bus driving to see Sheikh Nazim, or if we had the day off and undertook an excursion. It was very pleasant to have the company of women again. We were a mixture of Arabs, Turks, English, Germans, so far one Australian, Pakistanis, Spanish and French, with the Italians coming the following week! I met an English lady again after twenty years or more. I had first met her in London. We talked about our sheltered upbringing, how we had both been to girls' schools and how, when she had first met Sheikh Nazim, he had called her

"If I don't work to serve you, then what work should I do?"

'Before Time Person' because she had such old-fashioned ways, comparable to the good manners or *adhab* of devout Muslims.

Every morning Sheikh Anwar brought us our breakfast on a tray balanced on his head. He sang loudly and melodiously as he mounted the stairs and called out that our breakfast was ready. He was often to be seen carrying huge trays full of all the most exotic dishes which Syrian cooking has to offer, as he went upstairs to the men's dormitory or to ours. Our *harem* or dormitory had a marvellous view over Damascus. Mount Qasiyun is the highest point in Damascus from which the entire city can be seen. In the early morning light the arid mountains and the city take on a dusty, pinkish-lilac tone. At dusk the whole scene changes to orange-sepia. Our accommodation was very pleasant and full of light. I actually had a bed because I was the eldest, and two little girls were building a house of mattresses beside it. It was lovely to wake up and hear them chattering to each other in their little house in the early mornings.

A small bus had been organised for devotees who wished to see Sheikh Nazim. He was staying with relatives of his wife, Hajji Amina. When we arrived he was downstairs with the men. I greeted his wife and sat with all the ladies. Later we all prayed in congregation. I greeted Sheikh Nazim when he came upstairs, whereupon he ordered a tray of food for me, telling me to sit down in another room and have lunch.

One afternoon Jalal, my husband, and I decided to go up to the *Arba'in*, a small mosque high up the mountain with tombs of forty saints who are said to be the protectors of Damascus. There was a breathtaking view of Damascus from there. The imam greeted us and took us upstairs to the *maqam* where the forty saints are buried. There was tremendous peace and a sense of timelessness in that simple room. We could hear the birds building their nests in the roof and the sun filtered through the wooden beams, with adobe and straw between. We went back to the *imam* who showed us a cave underneath the mosque where there is a *maqam* to Khalil Ibrahim (Abraham) on one side and on the other, to Khidr, the Green One. We did two *rak'aats* at each *maqam*. Then we were shown where the first murder had taken place. Cain had killed his brother Abel by hitting him on the head with a stone. We saw the place where blood drips from the mountain where Abel was supposed to have been killed. We were also shown the tears dropping from the ceiling of the cave from two stones, known as eyes. It is said that the mountain has been crying ever since the day when Adam found his murdered son Abel there, killed by his brother Cain.

That evening we were invited to have dinner with Sheikh Nazim, and, as usual, we had a sumptuous feast.

We women were lucky enough to eat at the Sheikh's table. It was wonderful to be together again. Suddenly, just before *'Isha'*<sup>2</sup> some of the Turkish followers arrived from Istanbul. They had come straight from the airport. These were pupils who have been with Sheikh Nazim for many years, most of whom I remembered from a trip to Istanbul with our Sheikh back in 1991. As each one stepped into the room, ready to pray *'Isha'* behind their Sheikh, everybody clapped with pleasure to see them. Some of the women even ululated as a sign of their joy at the safe arrival of the Turkish pupils.

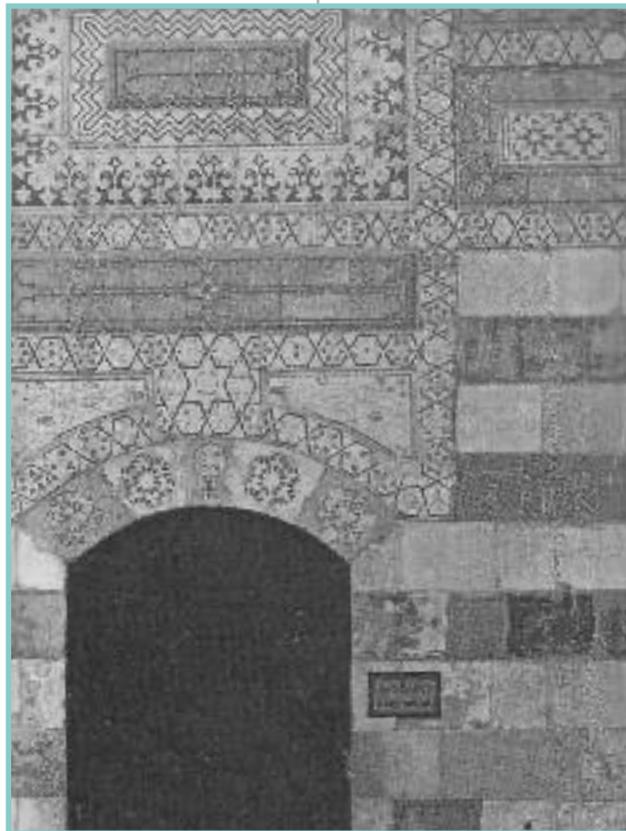
After the prayer Sheikh Nazim went downstairs to give a

talk for the men. We women all stayed upstairs. Suddenly, at about one o'clock in the morning everybody started going to bed and I was alone with the ladies who had newly arrived from Cyprus. The bus with the men (including my husband) must have gone off without us! It was decided that we should stay the night, so the lady of the house brought sheets and pillows. We curtained off the dining room with a sheet and settled down. It seemed a very short time before somebody came into the room and, clapping her hands three times, announced that *Tahajjud*<sup>3</sup> was taking place. It was awe-inspiring to see how people gathered silently in order to pray *Tahajjud* and the morning prayer behind Sheikh Nazim. Whole families came running through the

streets at three o'clock in the morning to be with our Sheikh. There was complete stillness and peace, for in the presence of Sheikh Nazim hearts are transformed by love for Allah.

We women spent the day catching up with the news of three years. I noticed again that every time I come to be with Sheikh Nazim and his pupils, it is like coming home. Each time I renew my vows and hope to become a better Muslim. Each time, friendships are renewed and deepened and new acquaintances are made. There are special 'soul' relationships as well – these are the

ones I miss when I am back in Germany, alone all day except for the companionship of a very affectionate ginger cat! These warm, sisterly relationships, or even 'mother-daughter' relationships function on a soul level. I was again very much aware of the love and devotion shown by all towards Sheikh Nazim. A warm glow of tenderness can be seen on the faces of many of his pupils when they talk to him and a feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood is experienced in this atmosphere of clarity and complete peace in his presence. Here nothing else matters but prayer.



<sup>1</sup> Pupils, disciples. <sup>2</sup> The night prayer. <sup>3</sup> A vigil in the last quarter of the night.

# “Happy travelling on your journey”

A long held wish to walk the pilgrimage route to Santiago di Compostello in Spain, had been an idea that nagged at the back of my mind for months, if not years, before it finally became a reality.

Thousands walk The Camino every year as they have for the last millennium. In medieval times it is supposed that people made the pilgrimage as a penance for their sins. Today they walk for all sorts of reasons: for many it is a religious undertaking, for others it is the physical challenge, for some a chance to escape the complexities of modern life, for some simply an adventure. There are many routes to Santiago and many ways of travelling but very few who undertake the whole or parts of the journey are unaffected by their experience.

I am not sure, even now, quite what the motivation was to undertake the Camino – certainly at the time there was no deep religious incentive, but it seemed a good way to celebrate the start of retirement and forty years of marriage. I also wanted to find out if I had the guts and determination to complete such an undertaking.

Last May David, my husband, and I arrived in Ronscevallas, in the foothills of the Pyrenees, to start our journey to Santiago, some 800 kilometres away. We did not have time to walk each and every one of those 800 kilometres as many did. We had taken a month to walk as much of the route as we could. Weekend walking we were used to, what we were about to undertake was something very different and the realisation of the enormity of the undertaking came quickly when we disembarked from the bus from Bilbao with our borrowed backpacks to find only the refuge, and a couple of inns, just as darkness descended on the mountains around us.

On our first morning heavy mist lay across the path and fellow pilgrims seemed as ghostly shadows from some medieval past, laden as they were with backpacks and staffs. Later the sun rose and we walked through alpine meadows full of wildflowers, and I wanted to dance and sing with pure joy at being alive. At the end of the day, with painful blisters and aching backs from overloaded backpacks, it was hard to maintain such a joie de vivre!

In many ways The Camino mirrors our daily life. It is a tough physical journey, especially if, like us, you are not particularly fit. It can be painful when your feet are bleeding and very sore and there is still a long way to go. Every day as you set off in the early morning mist and you feel the sun rising at your back there is a glorious anticipation of the day ahead. A sense of urgency of getting a good few miles under your belt before the heat of the day. The road stretches out before you into the distance as far as the eye can see - sometimes a daunting challenge, but at the end of the day there is huge satisfaction in looking back and seeing just how far you have come.

After a few days walking we began to realise that we carried far too much unnecessary luggage. The weight of our backpacks slowed us down, put huge strain on our backs and shoulders, and tired us out. We came to appreciate that we did not need all the ‘stuff’ that made our backpacks so unendurably heavy and we jettisoned it with a huge sense of relief. The gentle rhythm of walking day in and day out allowed us, in the same way to offload the mental baggage too. Life becomes very simple, you walk, you rest, you eat and you sleep. There are no decisions to make, no deadlines, no demands on your

time. It’s immensely refreshing!

We walked each day through an ever changing landscape some of it quite stunningly beautiful down through the foothills of the Pyrenees to Pamplona, then on through gentle rolling hills of the Rioja region, across the Ebro to Lograno where we took the bus to Burgos, the city of El Cid. After that comes the long hard slog through the flat plains of the Castilian Meseta until you reach the final 120 kms that take you through the last mountain range to Santiago and the end of the road.

Much of the time the going is easy and the miles slip by almost imperceptively, especially through the woods and meadows along easy paths. Sometimes the road seems endless, the lorries thunder by, the sun beats down relentlessly and you long for a cold cold beer! It is at times like these when you want to throw in the towel and say enough is enough - why on earth am I doing this!

I wanted to dance and sing with pure joy at being alive

Devotional Journey

Yet there is the wonderfully uplifting sense of being part of something bigger than oneself, of being part of a never ending stream of pilgrims - those who have been before and worn ruts in the road with their footsteps and those who will continue to come later, long after we have gone. It makes you feel pretty small in the grand scheme of things.

Pilgrims come in all shapes, sizes, nationalities and temperaments. The old and the young, the fit and the unfit, the positive and the negative, the happy and the sad. We are all heading in the same direction. It is in that sense of a common goal that The Camino works its magic. Shared laughter and wonderful companionship as we walked with others, as well as the many kindnesses that helped us along the way, are very precious memories. This sense of sharing is what sustains, uplifts, and encourages and makes the journey so worthwhile.

A wonderful piece of advice from a fellow pilgrim when faced with a particularly hard climb was to keep belting out "Onwards Christian soldiers" - I took that to heart and muttered it with dogged determination when the going got tough and the next step seemed impossible. It always worked!

Sometimes however, you need to walk alone. As the rhythm of the journey takes a hold the day to day complexities of home cease to matter. Increasingly one finds peace in silence and solitude and a growing pleasure in the grandeur of the landscape, the sound of the wind and the delights of the natural world around you. It's a bit of a shock to the system arriving in the towns along the way. The air seems stuffier, the noise louder and even the attraction of a change of diet from the basic pilgrims menu starts to lose its appeal! Each of the big towns and cities becomes a major milestone. It is an opportunity to catch up with pilgrims you have met along the way and a chance to reflect on just how far you have come. However, after a break it is always good to move on and leave the traffic and commercialism behind.

Always there is a sense of going forward and the urge to keep moving increases as you get nearer Santiago. There is

a growing sense of anticipation and excitement. At the same time there is a sadness that such a unique experience is about to come to an end and the day to day realities of life are about to return. The friendships forged along the way have become infinitely precious and have sustained and supported us along the way and as we all return to our own lives at home it will be hard to keep in touch.

The first view of the steeples of the Cathedral in Santiago must have been an awe inspiring sight in medieval times, viewed as it would have been across the final ten kilometres of open countryside. It meant you had survived the dangers of which there were many in those days, and your sins would soon be forgiven.

Today we are no longer threatened by wolves or bandits, and equipped as we are with modern boots and backpacks the journey must be a great deal easier for modern pilgrims - though your feet are agony all the same! Nevertheless the concrete outskirts of the city seemed endless, with motorways, roundabouts and suburban streets to be negotiated before we finally arrived at the Cathedral doors.

On the pilgrim routes to Santiago the most frequently offered salutation is not "good day" but "buen camino." Loosely translated it means "happy travelling on your journey". We had made it and were happy to have done so. A time now to rejoice, celebrate and give thanks.

The pilgrims' Mass is said every day at noon. We were lucky to arrive on Ascension Day, the Cathedral was packed. Watching the long silent columns of people moving slowly up the aisle to take communion or seek a blessing was an intensely moving experience. There was no way to differentiate between nationality or background, rich or poor, simply a never ending line of travel weary and tanned pilgrims sharing this last experience together. We were all just pilgrims who had been tried and tested along the Camino and were thankful for the unique experience.

I didn't set out on a spiritual or religious journey but it ended that way and for that I am profoundly grateful.

# THE *Gateway* OF THE *Gods*

I had heard a lot about the River Ganges as a child: I was told by my parents that all my sins would be washed away if I bathed in this most holy of rivers. So it was with great expectation and excitement that I made my pilgrimage to Haridwar, located in the foothills of the Himalayas: the place that represents the point at which the River Ganges reaches the plains. It is an ancient pilgrimage site, revered by Hindus for centuries. For me it felt like the gateway to the Gods.

Pilgrimages are essential to my personal religious journey as a practicing Hindu. They take me away from everyday life and provide the space and the time to allow me to express my devotion in a very tangible way.

I have visited many sacred sites – tirthas. The Sanskrit word tirtha, meaning ‘water’ has come to connote, by religious tradition, any place of pilgrimage on the banks of sacred streams of water. These include temples, mountains and other places where the gods have appeared or become manifest in the world. The mountain tirthas are particularly fascinating and project a powerful allure.

A pinnacle of Hindu worship however is *darsan*. Darsan means ‘seeing’ and to ‘be seen’ It is a two-fold experience: to see the divine image of the deity, and to receive a blessing from the deity.

I have stood in the presence of a deity and looked upon the image with my eyes, so as to see and be seen by the deity. It is believed that the deity is actually alive within the image and can be seen through pure devotion. Beholding the image of the deity is a form of worship and it is through the eyes that one gains blessings and positive vibrations. There is also the belief that objects left at the sacred sites will become imbued with a divine or supernatural energy. Prayers and requests are also placed before the divine.

My experience in the River Ganges fulfilled all my expectations – it was blissful! I entered the holy river with people from all walks of life. The water was very cold to begin with, but I eventually acclimatized and closed my eyes, reciting prayers and invocations to the divine. I felt as if I was very close to Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. My whole body felt spiritually energized and purified. I offered garlands of flowers and a coconut to Mother Ganga before leaving the holy water.

The Ganga Aarti - Hindu ritual in which fire from wicks soaked in ghee (purified butter) or camphor is offered to the deity - is celebrated at 7 pm each night and is a spectacular sight. The ceremony is performed at all temples in Haridwar at the same instant. The ringing of bells and the blowing of conches creates a cacophony of heavenly sound. Immediately after this ceremony, offerings of divas and

flowers are made to the Mother Ganga - it is a moving and beautiful sight to watch hundreds of miniature lighted lamps float gracefully along the river.

After Haridwar I continued my pilgrimage to the Himalayan shrines of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu in Badrinath, I felt drawn to these places and was spiritually moved. The pilgrimage to Amarnath was more challenging due to the long and arduous journey through the hills and mountains, in very cold temperatures, to the holy shrine in Kashmir. Various modes of transport were available including donkeys, however many chose to make the pilgrimage by foot. Throughout the journey there were chants of religious and devotional bhajans, and the playing of musical instruments, making the journey congregational and diverse. It is a true reflection of unity in diversity.

I journeyed barefoot wherever possible, many people chose to fast and/or dress scantily in the cold weather. Through these challenges we were able to empathise and relate to the suffering of poor and oppressed people. Thus our pilgrimage had a unifying effect in terms of bringing together Hindus, not only from India, but from all around the world. There were also many people of other faiths visiting, which was really in tune with the ever encompassing spirit of the Hindu way of life. For myself, as well as accumulating religious merit, I was on the path towards Moksha or salvation, which is the aim of my life.

As a Hindu I have the freedom to decide if I want to go on pilgrimage as there is no compulsion. I am free to worship God and to celebrate the Divine in my own personal way. I believe that God is in all things and everywhere around me. I have a shrine at home and also pray at my local temple regularly. Sometimes I pray through meditation and sometimes through singing.

This freedom of choice is one of the beauties of Hinduism. I wanted to be part of the rich jewels around the world and challenge myself to see the inspiring and breathtaking pilgrimage sites: I wanted to be part of that lively atmosphere and to have the opportunity to really stretch myself: I also wanted to step out of my comfort zone and search further for the greatness that exists around the world.

I feel that my pilgrimage has enhanced and improved my outlook on my faith and on my life. It improved my general well being: it gave me immense peace of mind and a sense of spiritual enrichment - as well as a feeling of oneness with others who share the same ideas and beliefs. It also strengthened my understanding of the Hindu concept of one Universal family of all mankind and eternal love.



# Service of Life

“Let your breath do the work”, he said.

I was downstairs in the synagogue office with my friend Harold and the beautiful black shofar I'd bought many years ago in Jerusalem. My grandfather used to blow the shofar on the New Year, my father blew the shofar wonderfully, my son has inherited the gift. So I am one in a chain of generations. But, as everyone who has tried it knows, blowing the shofar, a hollowed out, unadorned ram's horn, is an art which isn't easy. It was only a few days before Rosh Hashanah and I was taking a short lesson.

“Think of yourself as a vessel through which the breath travels. Then let it flow from you into the shofar.”

Harold moved to New Zealand several years ago and I miss him greatly. A cranial osteopath by vocation, he is a gentle man with a quiet, understated wisdom, a true healer of body and spirit. I always feel safer in his presence. “When you give your sermons”, he added, “You don't always need to put so much personal effort into the expression of the words. If they're good words and they come from the heart, let them go. They'll do their work.”

His presence beside me in the synagogue that New Year reassured me and I blew the shofar well.

Although our short conversation took place several years ago, Harold's simple counsel has stayed with me and I often reflect on what he said: “It's an act of service”, nothing sums up the task of being a rabbi, or a human being, more aptly or succinctly.

The clergy has become more and more like a business. There is constant pressure to consider marketing, publicity, popularity and competition. Nothing can be taken for granted, especially in a metropolis like London, churches and synagogues have to fight for their sliver of people's most precious commodity, time. This is not necessarily an entirely bad thing; it need not turn rabbis and priests into ‘purveyors of religion’ in the same way as others market fashionable brands of footwear or ice creams. It forces one to focus on the real quality and relevance of what one has to offer. I have seen some wonderful examples of how religion can be presented in a beautiful and compelling, but unobtrusive manner. I was recently privileged to see the cathedral in Dunkeld; guests were made welcome in the simplest and most gracious of ways. A lady with a kind smile handed us a plain leaflet which read:

‘Here the casual visitor involuntarily becomes a worshipper’. Well might this be said of such a house of God, standing between the Scottish hills and the River Tay, amidst verdant lawns among the majestic pines.

But the persistent demand to define success in terms of numbers, to cultivate one's personality and aim for impact, and raise money to upgrade all one's projects, readily risks becoming not only an outer but an inner distraction, eclipsing the spirit.

For at the heart of ministry is service. If one were to ask

“service of what?” the traditional religious answer would be “service of God”. But a better response might be “service of life” because life is immeasurably precious in its own right, and all life is ultimately a manifestation of God. It is an act of service to feed the birds, rescue an abandoned animal, look in on a sick neighbour who lives alone and needs someone to do the shopping, or keep company with a dying man. Any vocation is a form of service and the religious vocation is the service of God through the service of all

life, the smallest part of which belongs indivisibly to the divine.

A religious leader's greatest sin is to promulgate hatred; the greatest virtue, to deepen our reverence for life. Mercifully, in this regard life itself is a constant teacher. Just as Harold taught me to let the breath flow from myself into the shofar, so I learn over and over again that it is not my own breath in the first place, that nothing is ultimately mine, and that to feel the breath enter me, life's simplest, most essential gift, is at once a privilege and an obligation.

I sometimes think that it is strange that one can earn the title rabbi, or priest or imam, through a course of study. It goes without saying that learning is important; in Judaism teaching and rendering ritual and legal decisions are at the core of the rabbi's task. A rabbi has to be part of the living continuum of Jewish learning.

But I'm not sure that this is sufficient to merit the title of religious leader. That depends on how a person lives, on how a person serves. It can only really be decided after death, when our pilgrimage is complete and all our deeds are known. Did we serve life faithfully? Did we serve life with love?



life  
itself is a  
constant  
teacher

# PART OF THE BRITISH WAY OF LIFE

From as early as I can remember I have felt an innate and instinctive connection with both Buddhism and Judaism. In the early 1970's I studied Aldous Huxley's books *Brave New World* and *Island* for A level English, and was struck by the pessimism of the first book and the optimism of the latter. In *Island* Huxley interweaves eastern philosophy with western science to create 'the best of all worlds', but it was his reference to Buddhist philosophy that I found particularly intriguing. I resolved to explore Buddhism and visit at least one of the five Asian Theravada Buddhist countries.

Buddhism was viewed by some people at that time as counter-cultural and, like many of my contemporaries, my interest in meditation was inspired through pop-culture - by Beatle George Harrison and his wife, Pattie Boyd.

Whilst in my first year at Durham University I heard Rabbi Hugo Gryn talking about his experiences in Auschwitz on the Radio 4 programme, 'A Word in Edgeways'.

He made a deep and lasting impression on me, and I felt an immediate spiritual connection with him.

At this time I joined the University Buddhist Society as well as choosing Mahayana Buddhism as one of my study courses. After graduating in Social Sciences I travelled to Sri Lanka, the island regarded as 'the cradle of Buddhism', where the Buddha's teachings were first committed to writing over two thousand years ago. I stayed with a kind and generous Buddhist family and came to know the internationally renowned Buddhist monk, Venerable Narada Maha Thera (1898-1983). He became my Preceptor and, in a Buddhist Naming Ceremony, first 'administered the Five Precepts' (the minimum moral code for a lay Buddhist), and then gave me the Buddhist name Jayasili. I thus became an Upasika, a lay practitioner of Buddhism (male: Upasaka). To mark the occasion Venerable Narada presented me with a photograph of himself, with both his name and mine on it. Rather significantly, many years later this was one of the items I saved when a fire threatened our home.

As a postgraduate student at Loughborough University I studied 'Libraries and Librarianship in Thailand' for my Masters degree. In 1984 I visited Thailand and Burma, both Theravada Buddhist countries. After obtaining a post as Research Assistant at Manchester Polytechnic I was awarded a bursary to study in Sri Lanka.

I have attended meetings at The Buddhist Society of Manchester

in Sale since 1978. Set up in 1951 it is the oldest continuous Theravada Buddhist Group in the country outside London. I still stay there when in Manchester to attend meetings and meet old friends.

I have also attended Jacksons Row Synagogue in Manchester since 1980. I followed their 'Introducing Judaism' course and met Rabbi Silverman. It is thanks to Rabbi Silverman that I was able to meet Rabbi Hugo Gryn who had been his teacher.

When I approached the front door of the Vihara I had a strong feeling that the person who opened the door would be my future husband.

When I relocated to London after my marriage in 1986 I came to know Rabbi Gryn better through attending the West London Synagogue - the Dalai Lama gave a talk there in 1973. One day when I arrived Rabbi Gryn asked me if I had come to hear the talk by Ajahn Sumedha (the Abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery). No, I replied, I have an appointment with you. Good, he said, you can stay and help with the monks. Rabbi Gryn died on 18th August 1996. The obituary in The Daily Telegraph described him as 'Britain's most beloved Rabbi'.

My obituary of him appeared in the November 1996 issue of The Middle Way.

Venerable Ananda Maitreya Mahanayaka Thera (1896-1998), one of the most senior Buddhist monks in the world, visited Manchester in 1983 and during his visit gave me official authority to teach Dhamma and meditation. The following year, Venerable Hammalawa Saddhatissa (1914-1990), Head of the London Buddhist Vihara (Chiswick) and Chief Sangha Nayaka of Great Britain, also granted me this privilege. Venerable Medagama Vajiragnana (1928-2006) succeeded Venerable Saddhatissa as Head of the London Buddhist Vihara and Chief Sangha Nayaka. He authorised me to conduct monthly meditation retreats as well as weekly meditation classes at the Vihara in conjunction with a resident Buddhist monks.

On a more personal note, in November 1985 I was invited to give a talk at The London Buddhist Vihara. When I approached the front door of the Vihara I had a strong feeling that the person who opened the door would be my future husband. The door was opened by the Vihara's Bookstall Co-ordinator, Titus Gomes!

The following year we received a marriage blessing at a ceremony at London Buddhist Vihara, conducted by Venerable Ananda Maitreya. The talk he gave on this occasion subsequently appeared in his book, *Buddhism Lectures and Essays* under the chapter on 'Family Life' entitled A talk given at Chiswick Vihara at an English Buddhist girl's wedding.



Buddhist Group of Kendal

After my marriage I moved to London. The London Buddhist Society (the oldest continuous Buddhist organisation in the UK) invited me to help conduct their Introducing Buddhism course. To accompany this course, in 1988, I co-wrote a booklet, *Introducing Buddhism*, with Venerable Ananda Maitreya. This booklet has outgrown its original intentions. It has subsequently been published in Sri Lanka by the Buddhist Cultural Centre; in Taiwan by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation; and in Malaysia by Inward Path Publishers, re-titled *Buddhism: A Quick Introduction*.

After my husband's retirement we left London and moved to the little town of Kendal, 'the gateway to the Lake District'. In Kendal, along with colleagues from the Buddhist Society of Manchester, I co-founded the Buddhist Group of Kendal (BGKT) in 1992. Venerable Ananda Maitreya and Venerable Henepola Gunaratana Maha Thera (an international meditation expert and author of books on Buddhism), agreed to be Spiritual Advisors to the Group. My husband became the main meditation and Dhamma teacher in the Group. Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa Maha Thera, the Abbot of Ketumati Buddhist Vihara, Oldham, conducts a monthly class at BGKT. Seven members of the Group have undergone the appropriate ceremonies with monks and become Upasakas and Upasikas. Two of them have received authorisation to teach Dhamma and meditation.

I was the first person outside the USA to undertake the 'Twelve Bodhicari Precepts' at the London Buddhist Vihara on 3rd August 1994. Venerable Ananda Maitreya was my Preceptor. These Precepts are an expansion of the 'Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth'. The joint involvement of BGKT and Ketumati Buddhist Vihara in the development of the Eight Precepts and lay Buddhist teaching, are described in my article 'The Development and Use of the Eight Precepts for lay practitioners, Upasakas and Upasikas in Theravada Buddhism in the West', *Contemporary Buddhism* Volume 5(1) (May, 2004) 47-63 (ISSN 1463-9947) (available on-line at [www.journalsonlinetandf.co.uk](http://www.journalsonlinetandf.co.uk)). The article was deemed important enough to merit mention by the respected Indian publishers, Motilal Banarsidass, in their MLBD Newsletter: A

Monthly Indological Bibliography, XXVII (6) (June, 2005) 14. Ketumati Buddhist Vihara and BGKT jointly wrote a booklet, *Requirements and Ceremonies for The Five Precepts (Panca Sila), The Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth (Ajivatthamaka Sila), Dhamma Teachers Certificate* which was issued as part of the Buddhist Wesak Celebrations in May 2006. This was published for international distribution by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation in Taiwan in 2007. ([www.budaedu.org](http://www.budaedu.org))

I regularly attend Rabbi Silverman's Shiur (class) at Jackson's Row and in June 2000 Venerable Piyatissa and Venerable Hemaloka of Ketumati Vihara accompanied me.

On October 8th 2002, at his request, I organised a visit by Rt. Rev. Patrick O'Donoghue, Roman Catholic Bishop of Lancaster, to the Quaker Tapestry and the Unitarian Chapel in Kendal to meet people from other faiths and spiritual groups. I am a founder member of a local women's multifaith meditation group.

Although I have photographs of them in my living room, I always wished to pay tribute in public to Rabbis Gryn and Silverman for the support, example and inspiration I derived from them. In 2002 I sponsored a chair in Kendal, with a plaque stating: 'With Loving-kindness and Gratitude to my Teacher Rabbi Reuven Silverman 1947- and his Teacher Rabbi Hugo Gryn 1930-1996, from Jacquetta'. As far as I am aware, I received the first Rabbinic Hebrew birthday blessing in Kendal when Rabbi Silverman visited Kendal for my 50th birthday.

In December 2005 I received a letter from Burke's Peerage and Gentry stating: Burke's Landed Gentry, Volume III, England's Northwest including Contemporary People of Distinction ... this book focuses primarily on successful Northwest people ... to truly represent the Northwest today... In recognition of your place in Northwest life you have been chosen as one of over 3000 Northwest entrants whose names will appear alphabetically in the new reference work. My entry is on page 664. Many people have since commented how pleased they are to see that an authorised teacher of Theravada Buddhism and Meditation is now regarded as part of the British way of life and worthy of inclusion in such an august publication.

## BOOKS ABOUT BUDDHISM AND JUDAISM

**Bhikkhu Bodhi** (Editor), *Nyanaponika A Farewell Tribute: Life Sketch, Bibliography, Appreciations, and Selections from the Writings of Venerable Nyanaponika Mahathera [Siegmond Feniger](1901-1994)* (Kandy Sri Lanka, BPS Buddhist Publication Society, 1995) (ISBN 955-24-0130-5)

**Sylvia Boorstein**, *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist: On Being a Faithful Jew and a Passionate Buddhist* (Harper Collins, 1998) (ISBN 0-06-060958-3).

**Harold Heifetz**, *Zen and Hasidism* (Theosophical Publishing House, 1978) (ISBN 0-8356-0514-0).

**Rodger Kamenetz**, *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India* (Harper Collins, 1994). (ISBN 0-06-064574-1).

**Rabbi Akiva Tatz and David Gottlieb**, *Letters to a Buddhist Jew* (Targon Press, 2005) (ISBN 1-56871-356-8). ([www.buddhistjew.com](http://www.buddhistjew.com))



# internal WORLD

**B**eing a Catholic is a very important part of who I am. I like the idea that people can know something about me straight away when they see that this is my Religion. I feel complete and secure being affiliated with it. This was not always the case!

I once questioned organised religion, as young people often do. I felt it too controlling, too self-righteous and exclusive. The idea that there was no salvation for the unevangelised was a particularly potent falling-out point. So I left the Church, determined to lead a freethinking and unaffiliated spirituality.

Yet I soon came to feel incomplete. I realised that I had been 'spiritual shopping' and that this was a very convenient and non-committal way to live - and it required no sacrifice. I was taking, but not giving anything back. I longed for a more defined spirituality, a way to describe my feelings of faith, so I returned to my religion. In no small part this was due to my encounters with people of other faiths. I was so inspired by their devotion and discipline that I felt ashamed that I did not practice my own faith in such a deep and ordered way. The Muslims that I met struck me most. Their piety was so intense that it filled their identities. I would refer to "my Muslim friends" in conversation because I felt it was important that they be identified as such. This stirred a sense of longing for me to be so close to a way of life, a system of Religion.

I went to the Christmas services and the emotional experience was overwhelming. It felt like returning home.

As I re-settled, I became far more interested in the things that were decidedly Catholic, especially those that occurred in everyday life. Although I have not yet perfected the practice, I entertain the idea of 'fish Fridays', where no meat is eaten, and try to make the sign of the cross before meals. These are practices that mark me out as Catholic, and perhaps that's why I am interested in them. It felt very important to identify myself in this way.

I attempted to fast all day on Good Friday and wore a black wristband throughout. Although the purpose of this was to

enter the dimension of the Easter spirituality, I very much wanted there to be an outward expression of my faith. I disagree that Religion is a private matter; if it plays a role in your values and psychology then I believe you have the right to show it. It is a matter of pride and self esteem.

The most significant aspect of my Catholic identity is probably my identification with the Saint I chose as a namesake in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Back then all I knew about Francis of Assisi was that he cared for the animals and the environment, which I thought was quite nice. Since

my return to the Faith, I have discovered that he travelled to Africa to engage in dialogue with the Muslims; and that he studied and prayed with them. It is hinted that the three-times-a-day Angelus prayer was inspired by his encounter with Islamic regular prayers. It seems that our experiences are similar. At the time I did not know this and I believe that it was chosen for me, that I might deepen my

identity in the Catholic tradition while engaging with other faiths. For interfaith dialogue to have integrity I feel it is important that the participants deeply identify with their own faiths; I don't think that pluralism is the exclusive domain of those of a freelance spirituality. Even if you believe all roads lead to God, as I do, keeping within one Faith tradition is still important because it disciplines and orders your internal world.

Because this internal world is regulated along the lines of the Faith, my thoughts and values begin to reflect this. My morals and opinions on love and relationships, medical ethics and conflict, for example, are very much in line with the Catholic way of thinking. Of course I support these values because I believe in them on a level of right and wrong, but I also feel that I am a mouthpiece for a higher purpose.

I always say now that when I was searching for God, He was not the one that was lost. In finding my Religion, I found myself; God had not gone anywhere. I feel that the Catholic Faith is a part of me. When I was without it, I was missing a vital part of my own heart.

I very much wanted there to be an outward expression of my faith



# The Wall

## through children's eyes

### AN EXHIBITION

In April 2006 the Anglican Cathedral Church of St. George the Martyr in Jerusalem presented an exhibition entitled *The Wall through children's eyes*.

Palestinian children from the Diocese of Jerusalem, the international Centre in Bethlehem and the Schmidt's School in Jerusalem provided the drawings for the exhibition and participated in the opening with their ideas and experiences of the Wall. The exhibition was attended by Palestinian and Israeli, as well as international, guests.

The drawings were made during art workshops. They show that Palestinian children are anxious about the so-called 'security barrier' which is being built by Israel to divide Palestinians and Israelis. The drawings are being sent around the world to highlight the plight of the Palestinian people, who struggle to get to jobs and access medical facilities due to the barrier.

The drawings are very powerful, revealing the sad reality of the Wall through children's eyes. The pictures show that the Wall has created a feeling of captivity and isolation. Building the Wall meant the destruction of olive trees, farmland and homes. It separates families and neighbours, restricts movement, destroys lives and wipes out people's hope.

During the opening the children spoke about the impact of the Wall on their own lives. Many of them have a hard time getting to school or visiting relatives. Several have witnessed the humiliation of their parents at checkpoints. And often it is impossible for them to visit Jerusalem or places like the Dead Sea.

The drawings speak for themselves. They show that children are very aware of the political situation and are suffering from it. Using their artistic gift the children bring out the, often sad, realities around them in exceptionally expressive ways. But what made the exhibition even more special was the hope of the children. With the help of their drawings they did not only express the heart-breaking political circumstances around them but also showed the solution to the problem, namely that Israelis and Palestinians should overcome the barrier and reach out to one another.

Janina Zang, Communications and Art, Diocese of Jerusalem: [development@j-diocese.com](mailto:development@j-diocese.com)  
These drawings have recently been brought to Britain and displayed at Blackburn Cathedral by Anjum Anwar, Dialogue Development Officer at the Cathedral, and Canon Chris Chivers.



# FINDING POSITIVE SOLUTIONS

Interfaith marriage can be a tricky subject to deal with in the context of interfaith work. This is partly because an important aspect of building trust between people of different faiths is respect for the integrity of separate religious traditions. Interfaith marriage can seem to suggest that distinctions and faith rules are going to be dismissed or that they do not matter, or that a spiritual and cultural melting-pot is being advocated as a final solution to the problem of religious conflict. Underlying this also is a perception in many communities that 'out marriage' of children means ultimately losing them from the faith or the family and its traditions, through conversion, dilution or straightforward conflict avoidance in how they build their home.

Where interfaith couples do work out their own harmonious solutions to living with faith difference, from the point of view of a single faith community, it may be that a whiff of syncretism hangs in the air. Besides the issue of the survival of communities as a whole, families and parents have a natural concern about sharing their deepest sense of identity, of belief, belonging, religious duty and meaning with future generations.

Despite this anxiety, interfaith marriage is happening in ever-greater numbers in the UK amongst all faith communities. It is likely that many reading this magazine know someone in an interfaith marriage, whether in the family, amongst friends and colleagues, or even in church, synagogue, mosque, gurdwara and temple congregations. Yet as they have an impact on the faith profile of society at large, it is still common for interfaith couples to feel isolated or invisible in their communities. At a time when the need for interfaith understanding is evermore urgent, the taboo that exists around the idea of interfaith marriage in many faith communities means that the interfaith life of couples is largely a private one. It also means that their problems or dilemmas may have to be faced in isolation, often without understanding support from faith communities.

Other than the ground-breaking work of Rabbi Jonathan Romain, there has been little so far available in Britain to help interfaith couples find their own positive solutions to the issues they face. This fact led to the creation of the interfaith marriage network [www.interfaithmarriage.org.uk](http://www.interfaithmarriage.org.uk) as a space for couples to share and support each other. This site is now being re-launched together with a free 68 page resource pack for interfaith couples that covers a range of issues - from the practical to the profound - that any couple with different religious backgrounds or identities are likely to have to think about.

Even people who do not see religious identity as important often find that in an interfaith and intercultural marriage it becomes so, for example in the sense of affiliation and belonging which can surprise at different moments of life, or in the desire to pass on 'something important' to children. Managing these experiences and respecting those of a partner is part of what

makes people describe their interfaith marriages as challenging but enriching. It is where they are not managed that a failed interfaith marriage can end up being a symbol of religion as a divisive force.

However sensitive, interfaith marriage is an important issue for different faiths to address cooperatively. In many traditions, the answer to intermarriage (if it cannot be prevented) is conversion. 'Conversion for love' is an ancient and beautiful concept but in the modern context it should carry certain caveats: should romance fail what happens to religious identity? There may also be concerns about the emotionally vulnerable when religious identity is involved. At times conversion becomes a means of avoiding dire consequences rather than a sincere expression: marrying out when your faith does not allow it can have a devastating effect in the form of guilt, and social exclusion, whereas a partner's conversion holds the key to a religious wedding and the family legitimisation that goes with it.

Where an interfaith relationship leads to conversion it is sometimes forgotten within faith communities that the fact of faith difference is not removed from the heart of the family. It means rather that the two faiths meet not in the husband-wife relationship but in a parent-child one. This is of course also the case in families where the two spouses keep their separate faith but agree to raise children in one of their faiths only. In a multi-faith

society it is crucial for faiths to explore their teachings on how believers deal with those of other faiths, it is even more vital and acute when the people of those other faiths happen to be your parents, your children or your spouse. Where faiths fail to do this they risk becoming agents of harm rather than good, causing division in families, effectively counselling distance towards those who in all traditions are naturally and properly owed love.

Of course it is reasonable to say that bad outcomes are reasons why interfaith marriage should be discouraged, or even illegal, as it is in many parts of the world. Part of the impetus towards separateness amongst some faith communities in the UK arises from a realistic assessment of what happens when young people of different faiths and cultures meet and mix without impediment. They fall in love, they form relationships, they may marry.

Yet in the context of British law relationships and marriage are ultimately a private matter. The choice of the couple involved, rather than the preference of a parent or faith rules about permissibility, are what the law defends. You don't need your faith leader's permission to marry. While choosing to exercise this freedom many in interfaith marriages report that their religion does still matter to them. They may be outside the bounds of what is religiously recognised but they continue to feel part of their faith and even wish to pass it on to their children: their identity lies at the boundary rather than in the safe separate centre of their communities.

**two faiths meet  
not in the  
husband-wife  
relationship but  
in a parent-  
child one**

The  
*Holy Well*  
at Humphrey Head

I had the map, but all the way I saw  
the journey we made last time, the cast iron  
signs we followed like a creed, the loose light  
that toyed with dyke and hedge till we believed  
our right to water, holy or profane,  
was divine, like us: we lost our way.

And seeing what I hadn't seen before,  
bog-cotton sown when millhands on the cure  
coughed out their lung-fluff to the salt clean wind,  
and rocks dyed khaki when lads with shredded  
shadows lapped the iron pool to sweat  
the trench rat from their pores, seeing them I saw

the smashed well-stoop in a nest of hawthorns  
and the sinking tin warning: this water's  
unfit for litigious times; but the stream  
still split the limestone and light, like hushed-up  
stories splinter into every map of now  
and mortally thirsty, I drank, and was home.

*Rebecca Bilkau (nee Irvine)*

OF

LANGUAGE

# “What Makes Me Laugh?”



In a newspaper article about the artist Francis Bacon (1902-1992) John Berger reviewed his opinion of Bacon's work.<sup>1</sup> He had originally felt that Bacon only painted to shock the viewer, and that the effect of such art would be time limited. He has now come to the realisation that the personal preoccupations of Bacon are of relevance to what is happening in the world today. He sees Bacon as the prophet of a pitiless world, and poses the intriguing question: 'Has the world always been pitiless?' He goes on to suggest that if this is so, then: 'Today's pitilessness is perhaps more unremitting, pervasive and continuous. It spares neither the planet itself, nor anyone living on it anywhere.'

Berger goes on to define the present historical period as 'the time of the Wall' noting that although the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 many have since

been erected: 'concrete, bureaucratic, surveillance, security, racist, zone walls'. In conjunction with these universal walls, he believes that walls of separation exist within us all.

The content of this newspaper article changed my art practice. I now explore the idea of us living in a 'pitiless world' and address issues around the 'other' in society, challenging stereotypes and prejudice. The walls within us keep us separate and detached from each other: my work attempts to reverse this process.

My exhibition "What Makes Me Laugh?" is part of a body of work exploring issues around 9/11 and 7/7, and stems largely from my concern about the violent backlash against members of the Muslim Community in Britain in the short aftermath of 7/7.



Humour and fun can  
cut through many  
difficult situations



The Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) issued two leaflets after 7/7 – *Terrorism Not in Our Name* and *Stay Safe and Be Proactive*. The latter leaflet advised Muslim students to be proactive and positive. It was suggested that an art exhibition portraying a positive image of Muslims would be helpful. As I was exploring similar issues I felt I was well placed to offer help with this.

In *The Guardian* newspaper, (1.8.05, p6) I was fascinated to read an article entitled *Festival of Fun Reclaims the Spirit of Islam*. I thought this was a wonderful, peaceful Ghandian approach to a very difficult and tense situation and was inspired to encompass this philosophy into my art practice. Humour and fun can cut through many difficult situations and the germ of the idea behind “What Makes Me Laugh?” took root in that moment.

I was in the final year of an art degree at Lancaster University so I contacted Lancaster University Islamic Society and this resulted in a very successful collaboration. Two women, Masitah Ghazali and Sara Khan invited me to various Islamic Society events where I took photographs. A questionnaire was handed out to Islamic Society members to enable me to put a positive biography next to each photograph and the text I needed from the question “What Makes Me Laugh?” The exhibition was launched in February 2006 and enjoys continued and expanding popularity. It is available for hire (terms and conditions apply) – see [www.whatmakesmelough.com](http://www.whatmakesmelough.com)

## *sweet dreams*

I am presently working on another exhibition called ‘Sweet Dreams’ for which I was awarded an Arts Council Grant. Again this exhibition fits in with my current art practice addressing issues around the ‘other’ in society, challenging stereotypes and prejudice. The fun and laughter philosophy, which underlines “What, Makes Me Laugh?” is also present within this new exhibition.

With ‘Sweet Dreams’ I want to challenge the perceptions that some members of the general public might have of Muslim women who wear the niqab (face-veil). My inspiration for this exhibition came just after the row over the wearing of the niqab erupted in 2006 and I was saddened to read that there had been an increase in attacks against Muslims, including a spate of incidents in which Muslim women were abused for wearing scarves and veils.

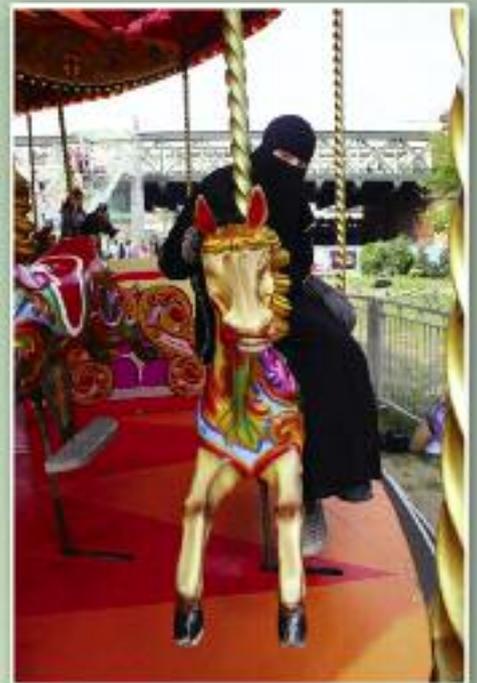
The debate surrounding the niqab is complex. I do not within my exhibition make any arguments for or against wearing it but simply attempt to address racism that flourishes more easily when people - such as women who wear the niqab - are seen as one homogeneous mass. I attempt to show that there is an individual woman behind every veil.

This exhibition was launched at Lancaster University Chaplaincy Centre in October this year. And like “What Makes Me Laugh?” it will then be available for hire.

From 1st October 2007 I will be Artist in Residence at Lancaster University Chaplaincy Centre and will continue exploring, within an inter-faith dialogue, the notion of internal psychological walls and barriers which prevent us living together in harmony and peace.

1 John Berger, *Prophet of a Pitiless World*, *The Guardian*, May 29, 2004

2 Jason Bennetto, Ian Herbert and Jeremy Clarke, “Attacks on Muslims Rise After Veils Row”. *The Independent*, 14.10.06



## Transforming love in a land of pain and prejudice

Some problems seem to be so intractable as to appear unsolvable. Israel-Palestine is one of these. And talk as much as you like about the miracle of Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness in Northern Ireland, or Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk in South Africa, it remains the firm opinion of most that the unlikeliest advent – in religious and real terms – of pigs flying over Jerusalem will be necessary before ever the Jewish-Palestinian problem is solved.

In the week when – depending on your perspective – the Reunification or the Occupation of Jerusalem was being commemorated, I was one of six companions – two Christians, two Jews, two Muslims – on a Three Faiths pilgrimage, sponsored by BBC Radio 4 – to the land we still dare to call holy.

What we heard from various voices – a Muslim Palestinian professor, an Orthodox Jewish woman – did not make for encouraging listening. I asked the Muslim what he felt about the destruction forty years ago of the Moroccan Quarter – its mosque and homes – in order to create the piazza in front of the Western Wall, and hence greater access for Jews to their chief holy space. I had asked both my Orthodox and Liberal Jewish companions from the UK and each had acknowledged the controversial nature of this action and the destructive loss to Muslims involved. They had put themselves in the shoes of ‘the other’ and glimpsed pain from another angle. But the professor by contrast turned his answer into something of a predictable rant against the occupiers’ evils. Asked if he favoured a two state solution as a way to move beyond the problem, and if, therefore, he would recognise a state of Israel, he responded that he would do so “de facto, but not de jure”. Where one goes with such semantic games is hard to imagine.

Similarly, without much prompting, the Orthodox Jew ranted against Arab terrorists who prevented her from being able to move about “her home” with little recognition that it was also home for Christian and Muslim Palestinians or that terrorists were very much a minority.

By the time we had reached the Palestinian Christian in the programme we were sceptical even of the value of the visit. Since we had heard from our two previous voices – and from a good many others – that, in the words of one leading Roman Catholic ecumenist, “it was over”: there was no future for people together only apart. The moment we set eyes on the Acting Dean of St George’s Cathedral, Jerusalem, however, we all knew – of whatever faith – that we were on holy ground.

For a start, Canon Hassam Naoum described himself in a way that was boundary-crossing and new. “I am an Arab Israeli”, he said, and explained that he has held an Israeli passport since the time he grew up in a thoroughly inter-faith context, with Muslim neighbours who are still friends.

“Stepping into the shoes and mindset of others is vital”

As an Israeli he married a woman who holds Palestinian papers. This Israeli-Palestinian passport divide ought not to have caused any difficulties, since for many years marriage to an Israeli meant automatic residency with one’s spouse. But in 2002 the Israeli Government revoked this law. In Canon Naoum’s case this meant that it took him two years before his wife could join him at the Cathedral, just outside the walls of the old city.

Such insensitive idiocy would have made the best of us angry, resentful, or even bitter. But Canon Naoum explained that he had made a conscious decision that whatever happened to him he was not going to forsake his Christian call to the love of stranger and neighbour alike. “Taking sides is not helpful,” he asserted with a conviction that was as captivating as it was refreshing. “Stepping into the shoes and mindset of others is vital” he continued, “learning to share is the only way forward”.

He went on to illustrate the principle by explaining an amazing project that he had initiated at the cathedral. This brings together two Jewish, two Christian and two Muslim families for a year to live with one another, to explore their burden of memory and to seek to overcome it.

What was remarkable was the fact that in hours of intense conversation this was the first time we were hearing talk not just that set out to venture into the shoes, or even the mind and heart of another viewpoint, but which did so by actively seeking to overcome the lingering limitations, prejudices and hurts to be found in the telling of his own faith community’s story. The Jew and the Muslim who had spoken to us were setting out on journeys the ending of which was circumscribed, hedged about by debilitating conditionality. But this Christian set no preconditions. He was prepared to take a journey for the good of all that would strip him bare, and could cost him everything, as it led him to an as yet unknown destination. He was the only one of the three who actually believed in hope.

The Christians knew that the story they were hearing was the Christ-like story of the one whose self-emptying love in life as in death made space for everyone else, because it gave itself totally over to and for others. But, as a piece of non-sectarian graffiti – a quotation of Desmond Tutu – that I photographed on the security barrier on my way into Bethlehem correctly asserted: “God is not only Christian”. Which means that kenotic love is not the exclusive preserve of Christians, it’s at the heart of Islam and Judaism too. And my Jewish and Muslim companions recognised that, in Canon Naoum’s humility and courage, they were rediscovering the best of their own traditions. Which is surely what the interfaith journey is all about.





The Krishna Janmashtami Festival marks the birth of Lord Krishna who appeared as the eighth avatar of the god Vishnu in Mathura, India about 5000 years ago. Krishna is the celebrated and much loved hero of the great Hindu epic *Mahabharata*.

The largest Janmashtami festival outside India is celebrated in the grounds of Bhaktivedanta Manor, Hertfordshire, donated to ISKON by the late Beetle George Harrison in 1973. Approximately 50,000 pilgrims visit the Manor over a period of two days and for many devotees the main event of the festival is to take darshan (sight) of Lord Krishna in the temple.

The highlight this year (September) was a flowered walkway to the temple through the spiritual gardens and woodlands around the lake. Bhajans, devotional songs to Lord Krishna, were played throughout the day as pilgrims journeyed through displays of Lord Krishna's spiritual abode and miraculous birth in this world. They could gently rock the deity of baby Krishna in his cradle as they passed by, finally approaching the main shrine with great excitement as they glimpsed the spectacular deity of Lord Krishna decorated with thousands of flowers. Priests in traditional robes performed a ritual bathing of the sacred Deities of Krishna with milk, honey and juices to the blowing of conchshells and waving of whisks.

Focus was also given to the vital importance of environmental issues and whilst Groups such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace gave advice on improving one's carbon footprint, devotees were on hand to give advice on reducing one's karma footprint – highlighting the central tenet of Hinduism that every action has a reaction and that this should be taken into account when addressing responsibility to mother earth.

# Celebrating the birth of LORD KRISHNA

# The BUDDHA Beckons

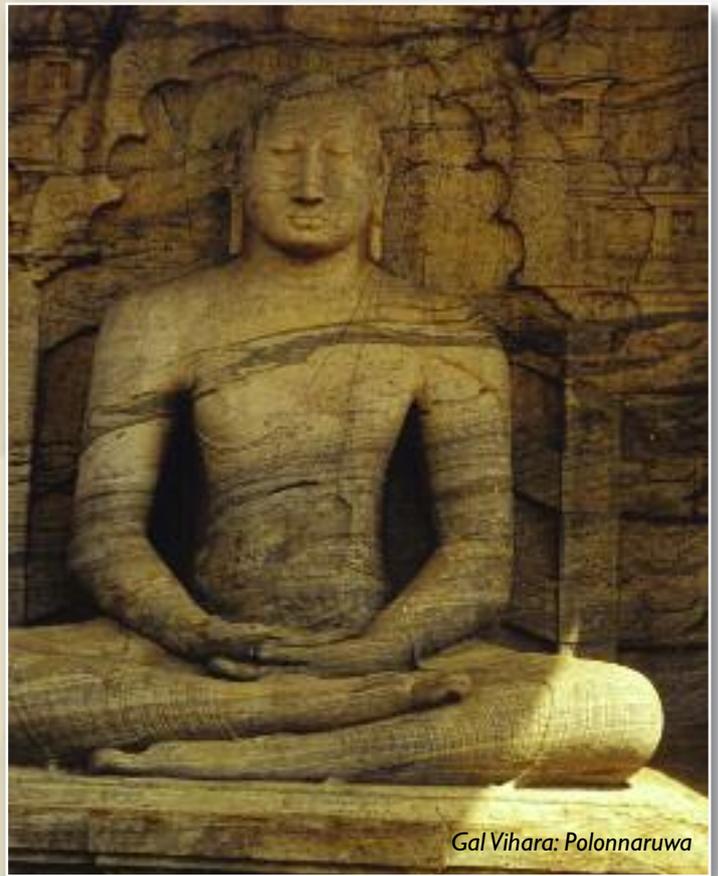
It was in Sri Lanka in 1984 that I had my first 'encounter' with the Buddha. When at the ancient city of Anuradhapura, I stole away from the group I was with to return for a few minutes to the shrine room adjacent to the sacred Bo Tree, the one believed to have grown from a cutting of the original tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment. Devotees dressed in white were sitting or prostrating silently. I joined them and looked towards the image which showed the Buddha sitting in meditation against a painted scene of pale blue sky, white clouds and mountains. Suddenly the image became more than mere plaster. All I can say is that it communicated: it beckoned! Against the blue of the sky, the serene head became suffused with cosmic significance. I knew that there was unfinished business between me and the Buddha.

The moment was prophetic. Two years later, I returned to Sri Lanka to study Buddhism and stayed over seven years. 'Study' is not quite the right word because, together with the academic, I also sought to immerse myself in Buddhism with the wish to see it through the eyes of Buddhists. I practised meditation under Buddhist teachers, participated in temple devotion and joined pilgrimages. It was a process that meant temporarily letting go of much that was dear to me as a Christian. But the rewards were inestimable. Never again has the image at Anuradhapura 'spoken' to me. In fact, on return visits, it has appeared artistically poor, certainly no match for the older stone images, open to the air, in other parts of the city. But then, around and inside that very shrine room, in May 1985 Tamil guerrillas gunned down one hundred and forty six innocent devotees, rupturing centuries of devotion with pools of blood.

My seven and a half years in Sri Lanka make it almost impossible for me to write about the Buddha as a complete outsider. I remain a Christian but the Buddha has become part of me. An exquisitely carved wooden image of the Buddha in meditation is now part of my home. The peace that emanates from it gives me strength. In complete honesty, I can say that I revere the Buddha.

But what Buddha do I revere? Do I revere the Buddha in the same way as Buddhists? To reflect on how my appreciation of the Buddha may be different from that of Buddhists is not easy, for Buddhism contains within itself so many faces of the Buddha. Yet, I sense that there is a common thread within all of these faces, namely the Lord Buddha as the supreme embodiment of compassion and wisdom, the one who has seen into the nature of reality and the human predicament and has taught the path of liberation.

All that I know of Buddhism tells me that the person of the Buddha is central. The devotion shown to the image is more than



Gal Vihara: Polonnaruwa

would be given to a human teacher and more than would be given to a god. *Acchariya manussa* is one phrase used in the Pali texts - wonderful man. He is human, yet more than human in that he was enlightened and worked towards this enlightenment without outside aid through countless lives of self-sacrifice and virtue. This, I believe, all Buddhists would agree to and such a being is supremely worthy of reverence.

How does my appreciation tally with this? It is the Theravada tradition which has nurtured my own understanding and it has done so in three ways. First, there has been my reading of the *Sutta Pitaka* of the Pali Canon. In the first two years of my time in Sri Lanka, I read through most of the *Nikayas* of the *Sutta Pitaka*, albeit in translation, and I found myself encountering again and again a teacher I could respect and revere. 'How absolutely right!' frequently came to my lips when I read the discourses. Although it can be argued that the dynamic of the oral tradition conditioned the texts in such a way that it cannot be assumed that what is now read are the words of the Buddha, my experience was that a person emerged from my reading - a down-to-earth, practical, compassionate person, who met people where they were and yet pushed their thought forward in devastatingly effective ways through appealing to their experience of reason. For me, a person shone through the message as much as the message itself cast light around the person.

I brought to my encounter with Buddhism both an interest in the contemplative tradition of Christianity and a commitment to social action. I found the words of the Buddha as given in the Pali texts spoke to both of these. One message which leapt out at me from the Buddha through the texts was: 'The way you see the world is wrong. Change.' At every level, Buddha was in dialogue with the philosophies and thought patterns of his time.

Deeds not birth as a criteria for judging humans; action not withdrawal from action; diligent mental culture to transform the mind rather than ritual; questioning and discernment rather than blind faith - all this the texts show him affirming and it appealed to me.

This practical, eminently sensible teaching spoke with the ring of truth to me. So did the picture repeatedly given by the Buddha of the consequences of ignorance and not-knowing, in other words, a world enmeshed and on fire with selfish craving, destroying harmony, generating suffering. This accorded very well with my own analysis of the roots of global inequalities and violence.

The second way in which I have learnt of the Buddha is through iconography, art and devotion. I can remember a Christian priest once said something like this to me: "The Buddha image speaks to me of coldness, of non-involvement, of a turning away from life. I prefer the image of Jesus Christ with his robes dirty with the sweat of the poor". I can see why this was said but cannot empathize with it. Traditional Buddhist iconography does present the Buddha as detached but my contact with text and tradition convinces me it is detachment from those qualities which cause havoc in society, not from concern for human suffering.

Within a BBC World Service *Words of Faith*, a four minute daily talk, I once made this comment on the sense of peace which emanates from the gigantic stone images of the Buddha at the Gal Vihara at Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka:

It is not the peace of indifference or apathy. It is the peace of wisdom and compassion, which arises when the heart-rending nature of human violence and human greed is fully realized. It is not an anguished, twisted scream of horror at the nature of the world inhumanity, but a silent, gentle embodiment in stone of empathy, compassion and strength.

This is what I see in the Buddha image. I sense it is what many Buddhists also see and it is a source of strength.

The third way in which I have learnt of the Buddha is through the words of Buddhist friends. "What does the person of the Buddha mean to you?" was a question I asked many Buddhists in Asia and Britain when I was involved in making a series of radio programmes on Buddhism. For some the Buddha was supremely a shower of the way, a wise, compassionate teacher, epitome of all that is good. Others went further and spoke of a much more personal sense of inspiration from the example of the Buddha's life. Yet others, spoke of realizing enlightenment themselves. One senior Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka said this:

I like to have my Buddha living within me. His enlightenment was personal to him but as the Mahayanists or Zen Buddhists would say there is enlightenment in every grain of sand. Why not within me? So I've already got a pacesetter, the Buddha, in my heart so that it keeps inspiring me all of the time.

Such witness has warmed and thrilled me. It does not cause me difficulty as a Christian. I too gain inspiration from the Buddha and hope that his compassion and wisdom will permeate my mind and heart. Yet, as a Christian, there are inevitably differences in the way I see the Buddha and the way Buddhists do. For alongside the Buddha I place Jesus of Nazareth and his relationship with God. I can draw into myself the Buddha's urgent message about the destructive consequences of egocentric craving based on the illusion that there is permanence in our bodies, our possessions or our happiness. I can benefit from the practice of mindfulness upon which the Buddha laid so much stress. Yet, I have to ask, 'Do I believe the Buddha discovered the whole Truth about human existence?' If I did, surely I would be a Buddhist. I am not. My encounter with the Buddha and what he taught has changed me irrevocably but it has not destroyed my belief that there is 'other power' and such a thing as the grace of God.

As I talk to Christians about the Buddha, reactions vary. At one extreme, there are those who see the Buddha image as an idol and Buddhism itself as a cult. At one meeting I addressed, horror was expressed by some listeners when I said I used Buddhist methods of meditation. They believed I was dabbling in the cultic. There can be no doubt that some Christians have no empathy with the Buddha whatsoever, and this is reinforced by material published and broadcast by some conservative evangelical groups. Then, at the other extreme, are those who would call themselves Christian Buddhist, often through a close encounter with Zen. I am a member of a Buddhist-Christian dialogue group in which there has been deep mutual exploration and a high level of sympathy and understanding. At one weekend retreat at a Buddhist monastery, the shrine room was transformed by the placing of a Christian altar with an icon at the same level as the Buddha image. It was difficult to tell who was Buddhist and who was Christian as we entered, since most of us bowed to both images. In the middle ground are people like the priest I have quoted who have trouble with the concept of detachment in Buddhism and see the Buddha image as embodying an escapist or individualistic spirituality. In this case dialogue can help to destroy misconceptions. Yet, the strength of this view amongst Christians should not be underestimated and it is compounded by the hijacking of the Buddha image by some New Age spiritualities.

My personal conviction is that the Buddha has a message for the whole of humankind, not only those who label themselves Buddhist. I do not believe that one has to be a Buddhist to revere the Buddha. The qualities of the Buddha resonate with those of other great religious leaders whether Jesus, Guru Nanak or Mahavira. There is a family likeness and this must be recognized and celebrated. But, of course, there are differences. The issues of divinity is just one. These should neither be avoided nor seen as inescapably confrontational. For it is at these points of difference that potentially there is most opportunity for growth. The apparent depth of difference can be proportional to the depth of the potential for mutual enrichment.

# more than just a statement

**H**M Prison Service Chaplaincy is committed to serving the needs of prisoners, staff and religious traditions by engaging all human experience. We will work collaboratively, respecting the integrity of each tradition and discipline. We believe that all faith and the search for meaning directs and inspires life, and are committed to providing sacred spaces and dedicated teams to deepen and enrich human experience. By celebrating the goodness of life and exploring the human condition we aim to cultivate in each individual a responsibility for contributing to the common good. We will contribute to the care of prisoners to enable them to lead law-abiding and useful lives in custody and after release.

This is the Prison Service Chaplaincy Statement of Purpose, written and agreed by the Chaplaincy Council and Chaplaincy Senior management Team in September 2003. But is it just a form of words, or does it actually mean something to those Chaplains on the ground in our prisons?

The harsh reality is that the Chaplaincy Senior Management Team, who devised that Statement of Purpose, have very little relevance to ordinary Chaplains in prisons. They don't fit into our line management structure and have no recognisable place in our submission to authority. In my own case, as an Anglican Chaplain, I am licensed by the Bishop... and directly answerable to the Governor: no mention of the Chaplain General.

However, the Chaplaincy Senior Management Team work hard behind the scenes on statements such as this and if we look carefully at it we can see the reflection of all Chaplains' jobs and ministries. What do I mean by 'jobs' and 'ministries'?

My 'job' in the prison is carefully contained within the statement. Notice 'work collaboratively' ... 'respect' ... 'provide' ... 'contribute'. All these things are part of my job and I enjoy them thoroughly. In practical, everyday terms, I visit all new prisoners within 24 hours of them arriving. I see all prisoners who are located in the hospital wing every day, and I visit daily all prisoners who are segregated in the Care and Separation Unit. Quite a visiting list before anything else crops up.

Also on my job 'task list' is to make sure that each prisoner's religious needs are met, whatever his/her religion or indeed whether they profess no faith at all. This includes ensuring that religious services are provided, that visiting ministers are available (and that my budget is managed carefully enough to accommodate them), that religious artifacts and literature is available and that staff are educated to the sensitivities of each.

From here on the 'job list' explodes into any selection of these on any day;

- Breaking sad news.
- Supporting prisoners who self harm or are at risk.
- Dealing with sudden deaths and suicide in custody.
- Preparing prisoners for marriage.
- Arranging visits to dying relatives.
- Pastoral advice or counselling.
- Writing letters and supporting prisoners' families.
- Attending meetings and a mountain of paperwork.

The list is nowhere near exhaustive, but it gives a flavour of 'the job'. But, lurking behind all that is a 'ministry' with a very separate

identity. My own particular ministry, as an ordained person in the Church of England is to bring the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ to all, prisoners and staff alike. Indeed, when an Anglican is ordained, and again when he takes up post in prison he/she is asked to make this Declaration of Assent;

*"The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, worshipping the one*

*true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In the declaration you are about to make, will you affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith as your inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to those in your care?"*

So then, my 'ministry' under oath, is to make Jesus known to all those in my care. On the surface then, this makes working with my non-Christian colleagues a very sensitive and difficult task indeed.

**But, lurking behind all that is a 'ministry' with a very separate identity.**

After all, the beliefs that I hold are very different, and indeed mutually exclusive, from those held by those in the Chaplaincy team who I work alongside. It is just not possible to believe the claims of Christianity and, say, the claims of Islam. So how does it work in practice?

This takes us back to our well thought through Statement of Purpose. We respect each other's traditions and disciplines. That does not mean that we agree with them, we simply acknowledge them as a genuinely held belief that is different to our's. We don't have to hide the fact that we think they are wrong! But we do have an obligation, in keeping with the Statement of Purpose, to deepen and enrich human experience by the way we engage with our friends and colleagues of different faiths within each prison team.

In practice, our teams are collections of individuals. Like any other small working group we come to know each other well and become friends. We share each others lives in work and play at some level at least. All members of the Chaplaincy Team are 'colleagues with no relationship of superiority or inferiority' and each team includes chaplains of all traditions and faiths.

In my thirty years in the Prison Service we have come a long way .. a very long way indeed. From the days of the ritual beatings and humiliation, particularly of black people, to the acceptance of an open and diverse community is a huge leap forward on the scale of dignity and humanity. What we need to be careful of now, is that we do not all get 'lumped together' in a kind of 'federal faith community'. Inter faith diversity... "yes" but a pretence that all 'believers' are the same... "no"! My own feeling is that there is a strong sense of secular superiority in the prisons at the moment. Perhaps the way to combat this is for people of faith to stand together in acknowledging our deep differences of faith, and yet loving one another for the flawed individuals that we are!

To finish where we came in, and to give due credit to the Chaplaincy Council and Senior Management Team, I believe that all that is encapsulated by the Statement of Purpose that we hold to ... 'Committed to serving ... respecting the integrity ... dedicated teams to deepen and enrich human experience ... contributing to the common good' To me, it is all there, and at the same time allows, indeed encourages me to:

Bring the grace and truth of Christ  
to this generation and make Him  
known to those in my care.

## Women of Faith Tackle the Media

We all know how influential the media are in forming public opinions. It is very obvious that they affect the way people think and behave towards others – especially those who are different in some way. If we want to build good interfaith relations we cannot ignore the role of the media. Many women from all faith communities are concerned by how faith is portrayed in the media but they also have wider concerns, for example the exploitation and stereotyping of women and girls, and the way children are targeted through advertising and marketing. But what can be done?

One small answer to that question is provided by the Women's Interfaith Media Literacy project (WIML). The project was launched by women from diverse faith communities to provide a resource to enable women from different faith communities to become more confident and skilled media users. With such skills women can actively participate in the shaping of the media environment.

All information, news and links to resources in media literacy can be found on the website [www.wiml.org](http://www.wiml.org) At the launch of the website in March 2007 Clare Short MP stressed: "We live in a spin-dominated media culture. Media regulators and producers need to be challenged. Women have to speak up to support what is good and positive and say what should be improved. And when there are so many forces promoting division in our multi-cultural society, this is a really imaginative way of encouraging women to come together across different faith communities to promote the values they share".

WIML is also aiming to hold a number of regional events to enable women to learn more about the media and meet those involved in the media. The first event will be held in conjunction with Active Faith Communities and Leeds Faith Forum in Bradford. Please check website for future dates.



Claire Short launching  
the WIML website

More information from:  
[medialiteracy.project@googlemail.com](mailto:medialiteracy.project@googlemail.com)

# *When the Heart is Captured*

Have you been there? Do you know it?

Are you committed to a life of devotion, a worshipful way that could be no other?

You could be but discipleship is not a choice, it's a compulsion. Once the heart is captured there is no other option; the life is taken over, and the rest is an attempt to keep up.

As for John, the beloved disciple of Christ, so for all true disciples. One waits and watches; waits and listens; waits to see what is needed; waits to answer the call; waits in the hope of pleasing; waits and serves. Yes, discipleship is service, all service.

To become a disciple is to give up everything with no thought of gain. Love is the guardian. Love is the guide. If there is a gain, it is transformation.

To be a disciple is to 'walk the path' of Him who knows. It is not merely being with, but rather being within that Life. It is attunement; a moving with; it is breathing within the breath of the Seer. It is the immersion of one's life in devotion. It is being within the ambience of Fulfilment.

But can I stay awake until dawn? Can I keep up? Will I be ready? Is my heart too far ahead of me – it has flowed out of me to be within the Holy One. My heart is no longer mine: it is captive. Love so powerful knows no personal need, no personal choice, no personal wish or want. Love so powerful runs after the anointed one in breathless yearning.

Have you been there? Do you know it – discipleship?

In discipleship there is no choice to become anything, if at all there is a choice - it is to be. To be all one can. Once the heart is captured there is no option, the life is taken over. How can I be as my Guru would have me be?

Such is my joy; I have been overtaken. But my joy is also my pain for the task is great – to walk this Way is to seek the very meaning of Life – to seek to grow in Being.

Is my watching seeing all I should see? Is my listening hearing all there is to hear? What is needed ... did I know it before it was asked? When will the call come ... can I anticipate it? Is my service all it can be? Have I really given everything or did I hold something back? Did I spare myself?

I have done my best; I am doing my best ... but will it ever be enough? God alone knows. What gifts and talents I have were bestowed for this alone, now I give them back in service and in love. I have nothing else to give than who I am. So it is for any disciple.

We do not give up our homes only. We do not give up our professions only. We do not give up our relationships only. What we do give is life itself. Give up? No... just give ... this is discipleship.

But the task can be hard sometimes and I fail too often, and that is hard too! Have you been there? Do you know it? Do you know too how wonderful it can be – yet how painful?

# Universal Gift

In Sikh philosophy and practice, the keeping of unshaven hair (Kesh) means that the Sikh lives in and resigns himself to the Will of God (Hukam). It is by the Will of God that man has been created the highest being in God's creation. This wonderful universe with its innumerable suns and planets came into being according to His command. The whole of His creation and the laws that govern it and operate the highly complicated system of the universe, are in accordance with His Will. God's Will is supreme. Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, writes about this supreme Will of the Creator in Japji:

*“By the Will of God all forms come into being. The working of that Will cannot be described. It is by His Will that the forms develop life in them and grow exalted... By that Will some are brought under grace; And the others are doomed forever... if this be rightly understood, no one would assert himself.”*

It is thus quite apt that the form and appearance of the Guru's Sikh should essentially be that which God almighty has given him according to His Will. A woman's beauty lies in her smooth skin and rounded face while a man's beard signifies his masculinity, strength and virility...

*Guru Nanak says: One should die with the hair intact; the hair with which one is born. He who keeps the hair as God's trust is really a great man.*

Finally Guru Nanak declared that with a turban on, the human form becomes complete in all respects and the unshaven hair is the symbol of the one universal religion, which we all inherit at birth.

# FAITH FUELLED BY

Throughout history Indian women have enjoyed the splendor of very long hair, taking time to cherish and maintain its beauty - sometimes washing and drying tresses over burning scented incense sticks to enhance its loveliness. Braided and tied hair, truly embellished and adorned with ornaments or flowers, is worn during religious ceremonies and auspicious occasions. Indeed, in India hair is used as a symbol to communicate a variety of significant messages, religious, spiritual and even social - to demarcate the interstices within the complex Indian societies and to mark internal boundaries.

But it is within the religious sphere that it has the greatest significance. References to hair, as a symbol of religious faith, are made in the Hindu scriptures, and many traditional customs and practices still exist in India today, and in other parts of the world where Indians reside.

Long, black hair is evidenced in pictures of the goddess or Devi in the Hindu pantheon - which illustrates the many aspects of the Godhead Brahman - the goddess is *shakti*, the personification of power and energy, and Lord Shiva's divine consort. The goddesses Kali, Durga and Parvati are amongst the personifications most worshiped by devotees. Kali is the goddess of destruction and transformation, as well as the devourer of time. Unlike the long thick black hair of the other goddesses, Kali, the cosmic mother, has hair that is dishevelled, symbolising her fearsome nature.

The Hindu mythological epic poem, The *Ramayana*, narrates the legend of the goddess Ganga's descent from the heavens into earth. The sacred Ganga is the holiest of the holy rivers in India (River Ganges) and is characterized in the Hindu pantheon as the goddess Ganga. The gracious Lord Shiva allowed the force of Ganga to flow through a strand of his '*jatta*' or matted hair. Only Lord Shiva, the creator of the universe could withhold the force and Ganga flowed humbly and gracefully down through a minute hole, bringing prosperity to earth. The flow of his *jatta* represents Lord Shiva as the Lord of Vayu or Wind, the subtle form of breath present in all living beings. Rules for ceremonies, through which the life of a Hindu attains purification, are contained in the Grihya Sutras (Vedic scriptures). These are known as *samskaras* or rites of

sacramental purification. They record a number of popular customs and manners connected with conception, birth, name-giving, first-outing, first-eating by the child. One of the *samskaras* is that of *Mundan*, *Chaula* or *Chudakarana* i.e. tonsure. The Hindu tonsure, one of the chief ceremonies in the *Upanayana*, or investiture with sacred powers, consists of removing all the hair except a circular portion situated on the same part of the head. This is known as

*sikha* in Sanskrit or refers to a tuft of hair left on top or back of the shaven head, it can be short or long. The *sikha* is also commonly known as *choti*. Today it is seen mainly among Sanyasins and Swamis reportedly signifying *ekanta* or one-way focus on a spiritual goal and devotion to God. It is also known that the *sikha* holds the intellectual power, and it allows God to easily lead a person to *moksha* or liberation.

Children with shaved heads are seen as innocent and holy and are treated with great respect



Image of Lord Shiva

# HAIR

For the Brahmin communities this ceremony is mandatory to entitle them to access the scriptures. Boys from abroad are taken to India at the age of 1, 3 or 5 years, depending on the customs of their caste, and in the presence of their deity the *mundan* ceremony is performed – the family having first referred to the almanac to make sure it is done on an auspicious *muhurat* or moment.

Sometimes for non-Brahmins the girl's head is also shaved. Hair is seen as an adornment so by shaving the head, the child confronts his or her bare ego. It teaches humbleness and devotion. Children with shaved heads are seen as innocent and holy and are treated with great respect. Shaving the head can also be seen as an act of humility for adults. Shaving, for example, at the Kumbha Mela, the great festival for Shiva devotees, the first ritual observed by most pilgrims is the *mundan* or tonsure ceremony. Hair is considered the symbol of vanity, and in order to receive the full benefits of a pilgrimage to a holy place, one must first give up vanity. Thus, the pilgrims believe that the hair should be shaven from the head in a gesture of surrender and humility.

At the Venkateshwara Temple at Tirumala in South Indian State of Andhara Pradesh, over 18 million devotees visit every year to pay their respect to an incarnation of Vishnu, the God that Hindus believe protects and sustains all that is good in society. The pilgrims come to Tirumala to donate their hair as a symbol of humility and devotion. In two large halls, hundreds of barbers work around the clock, tonsuring 12,000 pilgrims every day. This hair is collected and once sorted is sold. Women's long hair and grey hair are the most highly sort varieties, although demand for short hair is no less. The money that is raised is used at the temple to fund accommodation and other facilities for the pilgrims, and the rest goes to a charitable foundation that runs a number of organisations including three hospitals, an orphanage, a university and religious training institutions. There is nowhere in the world where faith fuelled by hair operates on this scale - 25,000 shaved heads each day of young and old, men and women, some 450 tons of hair each year!

The underlying concept is that hair is a symbolic offering to the Gods, representing a real sacrifice of beauty, and in return, is given blessings in proportion to their sacrifice. "The most beautiful part of the body is human hair," said P.K. Krishnaiah, the temple's top executive. "It is a surrendering of ego to God. It is a spiritually beautiful act to rid oneself of worldly beauty."

So he told her  
his whole secret,  
and said to her,  
*"A razor has never come  
upon my head; for I have  
been a Nazarite to God  
from my mother's womb.  
If my head were shaved,  
then my strength  
would leave me;  
I would become weak,  
and be like anyone else".*

Judges 16:17  
The Bible NRSV  
Samson speaks to Delilah

# A BEAUTIFUL HAIR Affair



**M**y love affair – with hair that is – began around the age of four or five. I remember sitting in a chair by the stove waiting for my aunt to ‘press’ my hair. Like many black girls whose mane was thick and ‘kinky’, I was told this would straighten and possibly even thin my hair out. It was reinforced that the dreadful experience – a crook in the neck, hot head and even burnt ears – was well worth the attention I would receive for my longer, straighter, flowing hair. Well, needless to say, this lasted for a couple of years and then a new innovation came along – the relaxer! Boy was my mom relieved – no more pressing!!

But this innovation, which was designed to straighten hair for at least four to six weeks, was particularly damaging because of the lye.

Eventually, after trying eight to ten different types of relaxers, a burnt hairline, and almost fourteen years later, my hair refused to cooperate by straightening. I decided to go ‘natural’ for five years. I never regretted my decision for one moment. After years of feeling inadequate I finally accepted my hair in its natural state.

While people have different reasons for going ‘natural’ – religious, cultural, fashion trends etc. - my reason was simple. I wanted to start being me and loving everything about me.

Ask almost any black woman and she will probably tell you that her relationship with her hair is similar to a love affair. Whether it is the long hours spent waiting at the hair salon, the pain endured from pressing or braiding, or the amount of money spent—hair is truly an obsession. While I realize other cultures value hair in Black culture hair is extremely significant and often synonymous with identity. Many individuals such as Don King, the late Bob Marley, and Angela Davis have used their hair to make a statement about who and what they are. The origin of this love affair can be traced back to Africa.

It seems only natural that the ‘affair’ would begin in Africa, since most blacks were transported from Africa’s west coast. Although the textures of their hair varied greatly, Africans expressed similar views to those of African Americans on the cultural and social significance of their hair.

## SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

According to Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps, authors of *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*: in the early fifteenth century, hair served as a carrier of messages in most West African societies. These Africans - citizens from the Mende, Wolof, Yoruba, and Mandingo ethnic groups - were all transported to the ‘New World’ on slave ships. Within these communities, hair often communicated age, marital status, ethnic identity, religion, wealth, and rank in the community. Hairstyles could also be used to identify a geographic region.

For example, Byrd and Tharps noted that in the Wolof culture of Senegal young girls partially shaved their hair as an outward symbol that they were not courting. Their research also found that: *the Karamo people of Nigeria, for example, were recognized for their unique coiffure - a shaved head with a single tuft of hair left on top.* Widowed women would stop attending to their hair during their period of mourning so they

would not look attractive to other men. And as far as community leaders were concerned, they donned elaborate hairstyles. And the royalty would often wear a hat or headpiece, as a symbol of their stature.

## AESTHETIC SIGNIFICANCE

Just as the social significance of hair was important, so was its aesthetic appeal. According to Sylvia Ardyn Boone, an anthropologist who specializes in the Mende culture of Sierra Leone: *West African communities admire a fine head of long, thick hair on a woman. A woman with long thick hair demonstrates the life force, the multiplying power of profusion, prosperity, a ‘green thumb’ for bountiful farms and many healthy children.* However, there is more to being beautiful than having long tresses. One’s hair also had to be neat, clean, and arranged in certain style – including, but not limited to, cornrows and other braided styles. They also adorned the hair with ornaments such as beads and cowrie shells.

Ask almost any black woman and she will probably tell you that her relationship with her hair is similar to a love affair.

## SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Many Africans believed hair offered a way to communicate with the Divine Being. According to a quote in *Hair Story* by Mohamed Mbodj, an associate professor of history at Columbia University and a native of Dakar, Senegal: *the hair is the most elevated point of your body, which means it is the closest to the divine.* Consequently, many people believed that communication passed through the hair. Some believed a single strand of hair could be used to cast spells or inflict harm. This explains why hairdressers held and still hold prominent positions in the African community. For those who are unaware, styling and grooming black hair is often complicated and very time consuming. Therefore, this time spent at the hairdresser often results in close bonds between the stylist and the client.

## DAMAGING EFFECTS OF THE SLAVE TRADE

As the study of American history has revealed, the slave trade not only inflicted physical damage, but it also left emotional and psychological scars. The most devastating scar, which is still reflected today, was that done to the slave's self-image. This is especially true as it relates to hair and skin color. As they both became the framework for the social construction of race.

Slave owners often described the Africans' hair as being "woolly", thus likening them to animals. These and other terms would later be used to justify the inhumane treatment of the slaves. After years of repression and constantly seeing those with "straight hair" and "light skin" afforded better opportunities, the slaves began to internalize these words. Ultimately, self-hatred began. In an effort to educate others about black hair and to celebrate its diversity, I have created a website <http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Fall02/Patterson>

Incidentally since writing this article I have changed my hair. It is now relaxed and straight again. I like my new hairstyle and do not feel any guilt for relaxing it. However, I do miss my natural crop!

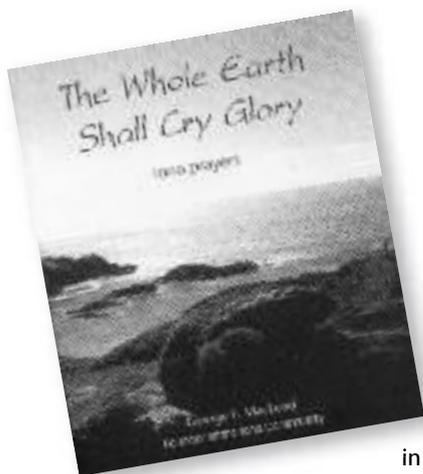
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*Symbolism of Hair*

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# THE WHOLE EARTH SHALL CRY IONA PRAYERS (NEW EDITION)

By George F. MacLeod (Founder of the Iona Community)

This is a new edition of a collection of prayers by George MacLeod who founded the Iona community. All the prayers and meditations in the book have been used at

some point in the worshipping life of the Iona Community during the lifetime of George MacLeod. The prayers evoke a strong sense of MacLeod's understanding of a God that exists in all material things, and a God that is accessible to all through prayer and worship. It also embodies the physical and spiritual essence of Iona. Black and white photographs of Iona are scattered throughout the book, complimenting the prayers and meditations in the stillness that their images offer.

MacLeod is often described as both a prophetic and priestly man of God and both these qualities come through in his prayers. There is a real sense of ministry to the people of God and his creation, as well as a prophetic force that makes you question and reflect on the reality that is around you. I got the impression that Prayer for MacLeod is not something to be done lightly, it is

a serious business that is focused and proactive, prayer is something that in itself becomes a creative force. This is clearly illustrated in one of his meditations when he writes: "Let us pray for the peace of the world. Prayer is the same word as pray-er, Lord. You can't begin to answer us till we are the words we pray...".

The language of the prayers is both traditional and powerful, evoking the awesomeness of God that runs through the created order of all things in the world. MacLeod marries religious theology with the political, the social and the personal aspects of our being that coexist with each other, and interprets them through the life of Christ, the Church and the Christian community. MacLeod's orthodox values of the role of the Church may come across today as being slightly old fashioned and hierarchical but at the same time there is a deep understanding of the need for grass roots spirituality within the church, and the need for change and liberation, that is a very modern concern of many.

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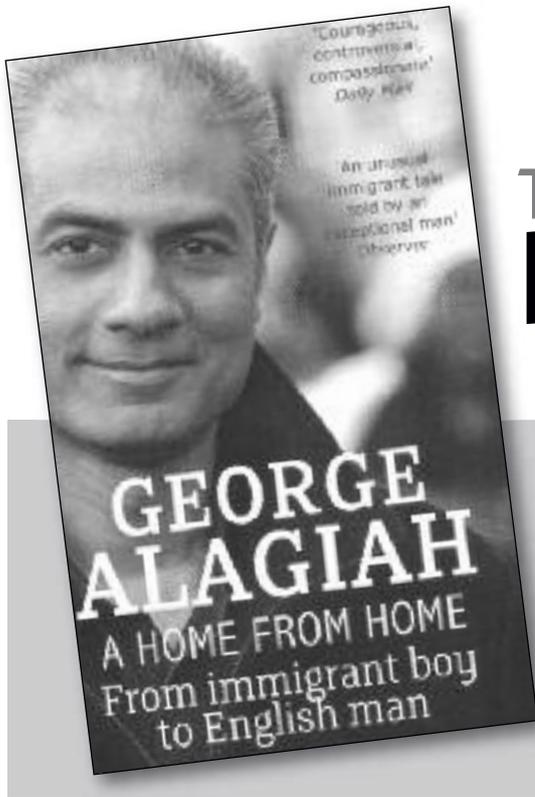
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# THE HOMECOMING

We thank George Alagiah for giving us the opportunity of featuring an extract from his book: *A HOME FROM HOME: From immigrant boy to English man*. We have chosen a piece from the final chapter of a story that conveys perceptive and moving insights into the multi-faceted experience of immigration, giving rise to questions of personal identity and notions of belonging. As an immigrant twice over – from Sri Lanka to Ghana and on to England - George Alagiah is well placed to reflect on the making and shaping of multiculturalism and urges a review of our race-relations policies and practices that have inadvertently fostered segregation between and within communities.

Heather Wells, Editor

“I’m not up to it, son. You do it.” It sounded as if my father were asking me to do some little chore, some piffling thing that didn’t matter. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The economy of his words belied the weight of the task he was asking me to perform. It was the traditional homecoming ceremony for Rukshini, the orphaned daughter of one of my cousins. As Rukshini’s most senior surviving relative – in both age and status – it was my father’s job to say something on behalf of her side of the family. The ceremony was not long after my father’s chemotherapy which had left him physically weak and, more to the point, lacking in confidence. To stand in his place meant accepting a role, a place within a web of relationships that I had only just begun to acknowledge – let alone accept – on my trip to Sri Lanka a couple of years previously. Simply to stand in front of that audience on that occasion would be more telling than any of the words that I began to juggle with in my mind.

There’s always an assumption that because I ‘talk’ to millions of people every night on TV I must be completely relaxed about public speaking. Not a bit of it. There is a part of the newsreading job that is about performance. Once I hear the programme’s signature tune, once the red light comes on, it is George Alagiah the news presenter who starts talking. The role itself offers a certain protection. You have to earn the audience’s trust over many years – in my case as a foreign correspondent – but the authority, part of that, comes with the desk. On my own, however, without the aura of the BBC studio to bolster me, I’ll confess to being assailed by the same butterflies that play havoc with the nerves of every best man who has ever

had to stand up in front of a crowd of wedding guests.

But any misgivings I had were insignificant compared with what must have been going through Rukshini’s mind. If I was battling with the idea of standing *in loco parentis*, as it were, this young bride had to deal with the idea of coming ‘home’ to a place she had only ever dreamed about. This was not Sri Lanka; this was Harrow, north London. Ten months earlier, in Sri Lanka, she had not even met the young man with whom she was now planning to spend the rest of her life.

The homecoming, which was originally a Hindu ritual, has worked its way into Sri Lankan culture regardless of religion. I was brought up a Catholic and Frances, my wife, an Anglican, but after we got married we too had a homecoming. The ceremony has its roots in the tradition that a bride throws in her lot with the groom’s family, often living under the same roof. In our case my parents’ insistence on a homecoming – especially as our decision to have a small, no-frills wedding meant the guest list had been tiny – led to some tortured logistical arrangements....

this young bride had to deal with the idea of coming ‘home’ to a place she had only ever dreamed about

Thirty years later, it was Rukshini’s turn to play the demure and contented bride. We had first met Rukshini during our family visit to Sri Lanka in 2002... I remember her sitting next to Frances. They had taken to each other. Rukshini had sung alone that night, her voice trembling with nerves yet expressing a deep yearning for love. She did not know then that before long her wishes would be fulfilled. We didn’t know then that our paths would cross again in such unexpected circumstances.

It was early in the summer of 2004, one of those balmy June days that fools you into thinking it will be a hot, dry season, and which almost always turns out to be the one you look back on through a curtain of July rain. We were in a school hall in Harrow which, for the afternoon, had been transformed into a little corner of Sri Lanka. From the kitchen that usually served up portions of bland, institutional food came the vapours of south Asian cuisine.

Instead of the greys and creams and pastel pinks that are the hallmark of English wedding attire, this gathering was a riot of crimsons, greens and blues. Delicate wrists weighed down with bangles struck the refectory tables with the satisfying jingle-jangle of gold on wood.

At the front of the hall Rukshini and her new husband, Jude Anton, sat in nervous isolation. I marvelled at the way migration had brought them, on separate journeys, from the northern town of Jaffna in Sri Lanka's Tamil heartland to this English suburb.

They had grown up streets away from each other but never met. Yet here they were in London, man and wife, embarking on a new life and making their mark on the changing face of Britain. Theirs is a story that started in war and has ended in love.

The eighth of August 1990 was a baking hot day in Jaffna, a town built on a flat, sandy, curved peninsula in the north of Sri Lanka. On an atlas the peninsula looks like a hook that has broken free of India, allowing the whole island to drift into the welcoming tropical ocean. If Tamils ever get a state of their own, which some of them crave, this town would almost certainly be its capital. That is one of the reasons why Jaffna, and the surrounding countryside, has been the scene of some of the most vicious fighting in Sri Lanka's on-off civil war. If the thousands of civilians who have been killed in the conflict attest to its inhumanity, the burning, in 1981, of the Jaffna public library – with its precious collection of Tamil literature – must surely be evidence of its senselessness.

At the age of thirteen Jude Susivan Anton had developed a keen ear for impending disaster. Like so many people in Jaffna he knew which sounds to ignore and which should send him scurrying to the bunker most families had dug in their gardens. It was the drone of a distant aircraft that alerted him that day. Was this a dummy run, a reconnaissance flight, or the real thing – a bombing raid?

The answer to that question came with the first explosion. The street went quiet; you could almost hear the swish of palmyra palms. Jude began a silent, fearful countdown. The people of Jaffna had learned through bitter experience that there were eight bombs on every plane and it was rare for the Chinese-built Y8s of the Sri Lankan Air Force to depart without disgorging all their

vicious cargo. One. Two. The noise got louder and Jude knew that the plane might be coming in his direction, that his home might be under the plane's murderous flight path. Three. After a while he could even see the fat-bellied bombs tumbling out of the plane like lazy acrobats in a slow-motion circus. Four. There was something very familiar about Jude's description. I remembered how, in other parts of the world, I had seen planes drop bundles of food to the starving. Same technique. Different consequences.

Five. Six. As a child I too used to look up at the sky and count. In Ghana's rainy season I used to calculate the seconds between a flash of lightning across a steel-grey sky and the thunder that followed.

As the gap between the two got shorter I would know with skin-tingling anticipation that the storm was coming our way. I would marvel at the power of nature; that August day Jude feared the power of man. Seven. The silence in the street gave way to screams of panic. Mothers grabbed their children. Dogs howled and barked. Fistfuls of money were pulled out from under mattresses. Fathers cursed. Jude and his mother went one way, his father another. They ducked into a neighbour's bunker;

Jude shut his eyes and covered his ears. Eight. The mud walls of the bunker shook. Heat and dust. Rubble rained down on the looted railway sleepers that now served as the roof of the bunker. Up above, in a clear blue sky, the plane banked perfectly and turned for base.

When they emerged into daylight, Jude and his mother looked across the road. There was one thought on both their minds.

Where is *appa*, where is father? Leo Anton Saverimuthu crawled out of his own bunker. He too was safe. The family stood together in what used to be their front garden and looked at where their house should have been. Number 4 Mount Carmel Road had taken a direct hit. The 750 kg bomb had crashed through the terracotta-tiled roof and landed in a bedroom. They could see a hot, twisted part of the shell casing; it was like an obscene calling card left behind by an intruder. The eighth of August 1990, the day Jude's life changed.

About half an hour's walk across Jaffna, on Hospital Road, an eleven-year-old girl was going about her chores. Perhaps Rukshini Fontgalau had heard the same plane, watched its destructive path across the sky. It's certainly likely. In Jaffna no one ever ignored the Y8s. She may even have rushed into her family's bunker. "I was always the first to go into the bunker," she told me. "I used to sweep the bunker every day. Try to keep it clean. I would light the *kumamjam*, the incense, and touch the statue." It was an image of the Virgin Mary of Vellankami which the family had brought back from a pilgrimage to that holy shrine.



Theirs is a story  
that started in  
war and has  
ended in love.

That day faith and fate kept her and her family safe. They were left unscathed by the raid on 8 August, but the war would change her life too. It would turn her first into a refugee, and later a migrant. In the years in between she would lose both her parents to untreated illness, victims of the war in a different way. As she sprinkled holy water around the bunker in thanksgiving, Rukshini could not have known that across town the Anton family had already begun to think about the first steps in a journey that would lead to their lives together.

While most of their relatives had fled to Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, and further afield to Toronto in Canada and London, Jude's parents, Leema and Anton, had resolutely tried to make a go of it in Jaffna. But the bombing raid had changed everything. It was decided that Jude and his mother would leave for Colombo, while his father would stay on and try to run the 'fancy goods' shop that he owned on 'KKS' Road.

Their reasoning was simple. Jude was their only child. His safety was paramount, both for his own sake but also because, as a boy, he represented the couple's security. At the time the fears of Tamil parents who had boys were split almost evenly between the chances of death at the hands of the Sri Lankan army and recruitment by the Tamil Tigers, the rebel group fighting for a state independent of the country's Sinhalese majority. Many Tamils had a love-hate relationship with the Tigers. They were proud that at last there were Tamils who would stand up to what they saw as Sinhalese oppression but appalled by the near-messianic devotion they expected of their cadres. It was the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam who, after all, had introduced the suicide bomber into modern guerrilla warfare.

Once in Colombo, where they stayed with one of Jude's aunts, their journey seemed to take on a momentum of its own. The advice from the family's web of relatives abroad was that it was time to get out altogether. As a Tamil boy, prospects in Colombo were bleak and their future back in Jaffna would be as fractured as the pile of bricks and mortar that had once been their home.

Jude's mother Leema – who was one of ten siblings – had three sisters and a brother in London, where his father also had a brother and sister.

The first step was to see an agent who could organise the trip to Britain. It was a decision Leema had to take on her own. There was no way to reach her husband, Jude's father, by phone. Letters still got through, but how long they took was anybody's guess.

The fee was £3,000 each, an amount they did not have but which was generously paid by the relatives abroad.

In October that year, just weeks after fleeing Jaffna and without the chance of a family reunion, Leema and Jude boarded a plane at Katunayake airport. It was the first time either of them had

ever set foot on an aircraft. I have tried to tease out the details of the journey from Jude, but he says all he really remembers is the overriding sense of fear. Besides, the agent had told them that the less they knew, the better it would be for them. "We were so scared," he says. "We didn't want to remember anything. We didn't want to see anything. We were just frightened." For those of us who plot and plan our trips on-line, ensuring that no part of the journey, from check-in and seat number to car hire and hotel reservation, is left to chance, it's difficult to imagine how faithfully Jude and his mother handed over this life-changing trip to an agent they had never actually met.

They remember two stops. Jude says one was in Africa but he doesn't know which country they were in, despite the fact that they were taken to a hostel in the city. On the next leg of the journey, to Europe, Jude was given a jigsaw puzzle by the air hostess.

"I wanted to keep it but we had been told that we mustn't pick anything up on the journey, so *amma* said I had to leave it."

Another change of plane and they were on the final stretch of the journey. It was on this flight that they destroyed their passports as they had been told to do. When they landed in London there were officials waiting at the plane before they even got to the immigration desks. And so they joined the list of those seeking asylum in Britain.

When I first heard Jude's story I'll admit to a sense of shock. Oh so comfortable in my Britishness, it hadn't occurred to me

that I could be connected in any personal way with someone who had had to do what he did to get here. I had met refugees before, many of them, but they were either people I had encountered through my reporting or exiles linked to causes that I had become interested in. South Africans, Chileans, Palestinians, Rwandese and Congolese. The one nationality that was not on that list was Sri Lankans, despite the fact that the country has been one of the biggest exporters of refugees since the

mid 1980s. It was a telling omission, a measure of the extent to which I had become estranged from the country of my birth. If I'm honest, I know it wasn't an accident. In *A Passage to Africa* I wrote about how, as a child, I tried to cut Sri Lanka out of my life story, preferring my family's association with Africa and all its apparent bounty. By the time I arrived in England, it was, as I have said, a case of 'sink or swim', with little room for my Sri Lankan past.

Jude and his mother, and then his father, all went on to receive their papers to stay in Britain. They became a part of the Sri Lankan community in London, one that I would have continued to have little to do with if Jude's parents hadn't chosen for his bride a young woman who turned out to be related to me.

It's difficult to imagine how faithfully Jude and his mother handed over the life-changing trip to an agent they had never actually met.

In 1995 it was the death of Rukshini's mother, my cousin, that had prompted her own journey out of Jaffna. She too left a father and a brother there. "I didn't want to leave them. I threw myself on the sand shouting and crying, begging them to let me stay." She had always been a bright student, and it was thought she stood a better chance of sitting her A levels in Colombo, where her mother's sister had already settled. She'd had to get an exit pass from the Tamil Tiger administration in the northern town of Kilinochi. Her first few nights there were in a church, after which the priests had moved her to a nearby village, Amathipuram. The whole business took about six weeks. Finally she remembers walking through the 'no-man's land' that divided the Tamil Tiger-controlled north from the rest of the country.

In Colombo she proved every bit as hardworking as her family had expected, passing A levels and then taking a series of diplomas in computer studies. In time-honoured fashion her studies were paid for by friends and relatives, including my father. By October 1999 she'd got her first paycheque as a trainee programmer for John Keelles Computer Services, a branch of one of the country's most reputable companies. Her father lived to see her vocational success but not long enough to supervise that other duty every Tamil father has – to ensure that his daughters are married off. He died in 2001.

It was around this time that the search for a husband had begun. She told me it started the way these things always do: "My aunt and others would tease me. They made it all look like a joke but you know it is serious." She was an attractive young woman with good career prospects, but she was hobbled by something she had no control over – she was an orphan, and that accident of nature placed her near the bottom of the league table of desirable brides-to-be.

For the vast majority of people in Sri Lanka, as in much of Asia, marriage remains more than the union of two individuals. It is the coming together of two families. A big part of the equation is what the bride's side is going to bring to the union, not least in terms of a dowry. Once, the dowry may have been a way of assuring that a woman had something to fall back on, some independent means, should a marriage break down. Certainly there is some historical evidence to support such an interpretation. But over the centuries it has become corrupted and is today little more than a piece of social engineering which ensures that marriage between rich and poor remains almost impossible. The size of the dowry is almost always related to the social status of the groom, making it virtually impossible for poor families to find the means to attract a husband from a wealthier background – at least without ruinous financial consequences. Add the continued influence of the caste system (which had so

nearly stifled my parents' romance) and you have one of the most socially claustrophobic societies I have ever come across...

In such a milieu Rukshini was supposed to curb her ambitions and accept that as an orphan she could not hope for a marriage other than to someone in similar circumstances. And sure enough, the first proposal came from the brother of another orphan. "I didn't like him. It didn't feel like he was the one for me. But I couldn't say no. I knew my position. I knew that not many people are going to be interested in me." It was the intervention of her own brother that eventually put paid to that proposal.

It was a brave thing to do, especially as the young man had had permanent residence in Australia. She had not turned down simply a marriage but an opportunity to get out of the country too. But she did get another chance. This time her Cupid came in the form of a Catholic priest back in Jaffna, a man who had, coincidentally, baptised both Rukshini and the young man whose name he was now proffering – Jude. He had maintained an

interest in Rukshini's welfare, and the first step was to send some photos and a video to Jude's mother.....

If Rukshini's lack of a family would have prompted an about turn from most men, it had the opposite effect on Jude. When he heard she had been orphaned, that was when he began to get interested. "I suppose that touched a soft spot in me," he said as they sat together, telling me their story. "I wanted someone who knew about hard work. We had to work hard in

Britain, we owed people money. We had to work for everything we had. I wanted someone who would understand all of that."

In August 2003 Jude flew back to Sri Lanka. The priest turned matchmaker, Father Selvarajah, organised a meeting with Rukshini at her aunt's house. The story of their first meeting is charming in its naivety and refreshing in its innocence.

In our world of love-at-first-sight and sex-before-marriage it's hard to imagine such arrangements being accepted. But with around two marriages out of every five in the UK ending in failure, who's to say whether we have got it right?...

To his credit, Jude had told his parents that he was not interested in a dowry. "I didn't want a penny. I hate the dowry system, it's like buying a person. Anyway, I didn't want my future wife to feel obliged to anyone – she would have had to borrow the money for the dowry."

Jude and his parents travelled to Sri Lanka for the wedding on 24 April 2004. Three weeks later the family, now expanded by one, returned to Britain. Rukshini came to London, she came home....

"I just want to say a few words on behalf of Rukshini's family..." The first hesitant words of a man unaccustomed to the role.

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desirable brides-to-be.

Till then the only family I had really cared about was Frances and the boys, my parents and four sisters. In our peripatetic life from Sri Lanka to Ghana, Ghana to Britain, we had become self-reliant, perhaps even insular. Yet here I was, standing in front of about 200 people, laying claim to something much bigger. A couple of hours earlier I hadn't even known that I would be making the speech. I had been looking forward to an afternoon full of colour and fun but free of responsibility. Virtually every single one of the people in that hall – except for one white English family (Jude's neighbours) – was related. Apart of me felt fraudulent. I was related by blood but not by habit.

My sense of dislocation was heightened as I waited to be called up to the front. The previous speaker, Newton *athan* (a term of respect reserved for male relatives), had praised the way Jude continued to believe in Tamil customs. In particular he pointed out that Jude would still use all the honorific titles that lace Tamil conversation. The wife of an elder brother, for example, would be called *anni*; an elderly female relative *peri-amma*. Newton *athan* listed quite a few. He drew a somewhat unflattering comparison with those in the community who had begun to forget such etiquette.

He mentioned the 'youngsters' but he could have been talking about me.

Why couldn't Dad have done this? I thought to myself. I looked across the hall. Rukshini sat there garlanded in red and white flowers, carnations and jasmine set off against the traditional red homecoming sari. She was radiant. She was looking at me, expectant.

What is Uncle George (which is what she had called me from the day we had first met back in Sri Lanka) going to say? It occurs to me now that the awkwardness I was feeling had much more to do with my own tussle with identity rather than any obvious disapproval from those around me that afternoon. On the contrary, just as I had found on that flight back to Sri Lanka, I was one of them whether I liked it or not!

All I had to do was to look at myself the way Rukshini saw me. There was no reproach in those eyes. No muttering under her breath, 'He's ignored me and my family for most of my life; now he wants to stand up and speak for us.' If anything, there was pride. She had accepted my new role in her life with the same equanimity she seemed to accept her new home in Britain. That afternoon I took my cue from her. There was no need to feel 'out of place', as Edward Said once described his own predicament, an identity stretched uncomfortably between the various influences on his life – an Arab Christian whose early education was in the British tradition. I went on to deliver a short but heartfelt tribute to Rukshini's many virtues.

As I took my seat next to my father and sisters I knew – even then – that this was where my book (of which not a page had been written) would end. Looking around, I realised that there, in that west London hall, was a distillation of all the versions of home that now exist in a world where migration is happening more often and more easily than ever before. For my father, as he approaches his twilight years, Sri Lanka is home. In the insecurity of old age he is drawn back to the place where life seemed simpler.

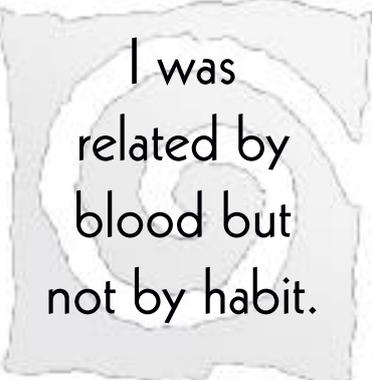
But he also feels at home in England because this is where his children live. We, his children, call England home because this is the place where we grew up (albeit in the trammelled version of England you get in boarding school) and where we are now most comfortable. Rukshini called it home because this was where her husband had settled. And all the other

guests? I can't be sure, of course, but judging by the way they clung to the old traditions, seeing how singularly Tamil the gathering was, my guess is that they still thought of England as the place they lived in and Sri Lanka as their home. Judging by the dress and savoir-faire of their children, it would not remain that way for much longer. A home from home – one phrase, many meanings.

Each of us in that room had a different relationship with this country, and any notion of what it is to be British has to encompass all of them. The alternative would be to say there are different levels of Britishness, in which someone like me is the full-blown version while someone like Rukshini is a half-baked one. That doesn't work, because in law we are both the same, both with the same right to live in this country. The old definitions simply don't apply any more.

The temptation, of course, is to ask the old questions about race and identity. It's particularly strong at those times when we, as a country, are feeling vulnerable to the threat of terrorism. Years ago the former Tory party chairman Norman Tebbit reduced it all to his infamous question about which cricket team you support when England is playing an international game. You would have thought that we'd moved on since those days, but in August 2004, while researching for this book, I was aghast when an interviewer on a radio station which prides itself on being cosmopolitan offered his own version of the Tebbit test.

It was a Saturday, the day before Amir Khan from Bolton was due to fight for gold in the Olympic Games. The young boxer, the son of Pakistani immigrants, had caught the imagination of the whole country and was being compared to another immigrant fighter, Prince Naseem, whose flamboyance and skill had brought him many accolades.



I was  
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The fact that Khan's father would turn up at ringside wearing a Union Jack waistcoat while waving a Pakistani flag spoke volumes for how far Britain seemed to have come since Tebbit's ludicrous suggestion that you couldn't be truly British if you didn't support England.

The station's producers had tracked down Prince Naseem on holiday in Portugal and he was asked for his thoughts on Khan's prospects. At least I assume that was the plan.

But halfway through the interview, the presenter reminded Prince Naseem that his own supporters used to wave both the Union Jack and the Yemeni flag. "Which flag did you most relate to – the British or the Yemeni one?" he asked.

For a man who had earned his reputation with the speed of his fists, Prince Naseem showed he could be equally agile with his words. Even so, his answer illustrates the contortions immigrants have to go through as they try to explain their hybrid lives. "Well, you're putting me in a bit of a situation there – but I'm born in Britain and I owe a lot in my heart to my roots and where my parents come from but I live in Sheffield. I'm from, I'm born and bred in Sheffield, mate, I'm a Yorkshireman through and through . . . I can't sit here and say that, yeah, I lift the British flag up and that's the only one that I hold allegiance to and all that and all those things. I'd be lying to you. I'm proud of them both and I am so happy that, you know, that I'm British and born in Britain and then again I'm so happy that I'm Arab, I've got the culture that I've got. I'm a Muslim".

During its winter tour of India in 2006 it was the England cricket team itself that provided the most fitting riposte to Tebbit's hackneyed notions of allegiance. In his debut game for England in the first test it was the British Sikh Mudhsuden 'Monty' Singh Panesar who trapped the great Sachin Tendulkar leg-before.

Monty's victory dance, which included leaping into the air like a kangaroo high on amphetamines, and the way his team mates embraced him, spoke volumes for how far both the sport and the country had come. If he is dropped from the team it will be because of his comical fielding, not his colour.

In writing this book, I have realised the extent to which even I have unwittingly been stuck in the past. It's the reason I felt out of kilter at Rukshini's homecoming ceremony. Though I left boarding school over thirty years ago, I have allowed its harsh test of what it takes to fit in to dominate the rest of my life. Both my trip to Sri Lanka and the subsequent rekindling of old family ties have taught me that I do not have to choose between identities any more than a Yorkshireman or a Scot does. It doesn't have to be Sri Lanka or Britain. It can be both. They are

linked, tied together in a migrant's journey. Only bigots ask you which one you like best. To ask someone that question is to ask him to deny his past. No man can do that, at least not honestly. Migration is not a test of loyalty, it is a test of character. If the racists and Little Englanders worried more about character and less about whose side the immigrant is on they would see how much richer their beloved country has become. It takes guts and vision to do what my parents did. No nation can afford to turn away such people. I have come to realise how privileged I am. To be comfortable, to be welcomed in two such different places as Sri Lanka and the UK is a rare inheritance.

Perhaps we need to come up with a new question. Instead of trying to work out where people belong, we should ask what they are doing now that they are here. This is a question about citizenship rather than ethnicity, religion or culture. It takes us beyond multiculturalism, described by the commentator Yasmin Alibhai-Brown as 'a non-interference pact between groups', and

into an examination of the contribution immigrants make. This way we can couple the rights that flow from gaining British nationality with the duties and obligations that come with it.

If this was the test, then the insularity I have described among some people in Bradford and Tower Hamlets would fail to meet the standard. But the failure is not the fact that the Mirpuris or Sylhetis are living segregated lives, but that in doing so it is harder for them to make a

contribution to the wider nation. The Tamil community in west London is a close-knit one but it is outwardlooking.

Every speech made at Rukshini's homecoming ceremony was in English. These are people who have an eye to what it takes to make good in wider society. The answer to race relations in Britain is not less immigration, but better immigration.

The old test was about where you came from, which always worked against Britain's 'visible minorities' – the West Indians and Africans, the Asians and Chinese. They were the ones who stood out as foreigners even when they were trying hard to become good citizens. But if we judge people by their contribution, we might deduce that we would rather have the quiet diligence of the Asian corner-shop owner who serves his community than the flashy extravagance of the Russian oligarch whose berth in Britain owes more to pragmatism than patriotism. Equally we might feel that the hundreds of thousands of immigrants who strive hard to better themselves, who hold down one job while training for another, are as worthy of citizenship as the millions who have it by birthright but never fully live up to the responsibilities that go with it. The test of contribution is colour-blind.



Being a patriot ought to mean more than simply waving a flag about. Ours is not a flag of convenience, like the ones flying above the armada of Liberian-registered boats that ply the world's oceans, but a flag of conviction, of commitment. We should move away from the concept of Britishness as something we can buy into off the peg, a ready-made identity kit. We should accept that there is no classic design of Britishness that has remained unchanged through the ages and which can be replicated like some garment in a Far Eastern sweatshop.

Instead we ought to see that it has evolved and is evolving. The flag that Kelly Holmes and Linford Christie wrapped around themselves in victory cannot be the same flag my father and mother might have noticed fluttering in an imperial wind over the governor's residence in Colombo. It may look the same, but its meaning has changed entirely, redefined by the people who hold it now. A country in which John Sentamu helps to run the Church of England and where Shami Chakrabati is one of the most eloquent defenders of our hard-won liberties is vastly different from the one I came to in 1967.

To get from where we were then to where we are now has been a huge collective achievement. Certainly it is one that millions of immigrants have contributed towards, but it is also one that would have been impossible were it not for the good grace of the vast majority of white men and women whose ancestry in this country is as rooted as a yew tree in an ancient

forest. They too have been on this journey. They have migrated from the old country to another country. They too have walked the distance. We are rightly quick to condemn the racist minority, but far too slow to congratulate the many who have gone along with change and quite often embraced it.

As I look back at what I have achieved since I came to Britain, I can see how it has been influenced by all those I have met on the way. Whenever I visit schools and universities I am always asked how I have managed to get where I am now – a senior journalist at the BBC. More often than not, the question comes from a young immigrant. It's as if they are looking for a magic formula. I'm not so modest that I ignore talent and hard work, but I always talk about opportunity too. I remind them that that is why I am here and why their parents brought them here. I tell them my achievements are not mine alone but those of the country we all live in.

When these students look at me, it is not an immigrant success story they see but a British one. It is what is possible when Britain is true to its principles, something never written down in a single document or constitution but which beats strong in the hearts of so many – a sense of fair play. That is why a life that might have shrivelled in Sri Lanka has blossomed in Britain. It is the difference between the country that has taken my family in and the one that abandoned us. And that is why, in the end, I know that this is my home and that Sri Lanka is now a home from home.



**(c) George Alagiah 2006 From A HOME FROM HOME published by Abacus in paperback at £7.99**

Sufi • SACRED SCRIPT

*Broad indeed is the carpet God has spread  
and beautiful the colors he has given it.*

*Sufi Scriptures*

From: Sid Hedges, With One Voice  
Cited: 365 MEDITATIONS for a peaceful heart and a peaceful world  
by Marcus Braybrooke: Octopus Pub. Group 2004

# HOLY SPIRIT

# HOLY *Beauty*

In a scene from his novel *Tarry Flynn* the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh depicts a dreamy young farmer returning from work and announcing to his family, “The Holy Spirit is in the fields”. His mother is alarmed and asks, “Is it something to do with the Catholic religion you mean?” Tarry replies solemnly, “It has to do with every religion; it’s beauty in nature”.

Perhaps without realizing it, Kavanagh is here touching on a grand theme that emerges occasionally in Christian theology like an underground stream, in very different eras and places, ranging from early Alexandria and Cappadocia to eighteenth-century New England and the twentieth-century Russian emigration. My purpose now is to give a brief sketch of its history and then to ask about its contemporary importance. Its fascination lies in its bringing together two areas in which we are dealing with what is profound and moving in human life.

## A Glance at History

The first Christian writer to touch on our theme was St Irenaeus (c.130-200). He identified God’s Word with the Son and Wisdom with the Spirit, described them both as God’s ‘hands’ and as being with the Father before creation, and said that God made all things by the Word and adorned them with Wisdom (*Against the Heresies* IV.20.1-3).

Irenaeus, like Tarry Flynn, was thinking of natural beauty. But another early Christian writer, St Clement of Alexandria (c.130-200), made the connection between the Holy Spirit and artistic beauty. After quoting Exodus 31:2-5, which relates how the spirit of God came on the craftsman Bezalel so that he was endowed with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill in every kind of craft, he says that this text shows that ‘artistic and skillful invention is from God’ (*Miscellanies* 1:4). Although he was a man of wide culture, who regarded Greek philosophy as the preparation of the pagan world for Christ, Clement himself did not pursue this theme any further; indeed, later in the same work he warns against artists claiming the divine prerogative of creation. He did, however take two steps that influenced much subsequent discussion: he says that God or Christ is beautiful, the ‘true light’ to be loved by those who desire true beauty, and that

the best kind of beauty is spiritual beauty, which is brought about through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Clement is not dismissing earthly beauty, but he regards it as transitory.

Behind Clement’s remarks is a famous passage from Plato’s *Symposium* (210-11), sometimes called the ‘ladder of beauty’, in which people are exhorted to mount from beautiful bodies to beautiful souls, observances, laws, and fields of knowledge, until they come to beauty itself. So Clement tells us that he who in chaste love looks on beauty sees the body as an image by whose beauty he transports himself to the Artist and to true beauty (*Misc.2:5; 4:12*). Of course both he and Irenaeus would have been familiar with the many texts in the Psalms which ascribe ‘sweetness’, ‘splendour’, and other terms cognate with beauty to God or places associated with Him, e.g. Ps. 27:4, 50:2, 71:8, 145:5; and, more importantly, with the texts in the Hebrew Bible ascribing glory (*kabod*) to Him. The latter term was used, for instance, of the visible phenomena associated with God on Mt.Sinai and in the Exodus. In Isaiah’s vision in the Temple the seraphs proclaim that Yahweh’s glory fills the whole earth, and they link it with his holiness (Isa. 6:3). In the New Testament it is ascribed to Christ (e.g. in II Cor.4:6, where Paul describes the glory of God as shining forth in the face of Christ).

By the time we get to the Cappadocian Fathers in the fourth century, the Trinitarian aspects of the question are made more explicit. St Basil, for example, says that those who have been cleansed from the shame of their evil and restored to their natural beauty can draw near to the Paraclete, who, ‘like the sun, with the help of your purified eye will show you in himself the image of the

unseen. And in the blessed sight of the image you will see the inexpressible beauty of the archetype.’ (*On the Holy Spirit* 9:23) Here the ‘image’ and the ‘archetype’ are the Son and the Father; Basil is ascribing beauty to the latter and seeing this beauty as being transmitted to the other two Persons in a linear pattern. Thus God is beautiful and wishes to beautify the world; and the three Persons have their own roles both within the Trinity and within this work.



**The Holy Spirit  
proceeds from  
both the Father  
and Son and is  
the bond of love  
between them**

We find Basil's 'linear' pattern used by later Eastern Orthodox theologians, e.g. Paul Evdokimov. In the West, however, a different pattern emerges stemming from St Augustine's teaching that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and Son and is the bond of love between them. We find this tradition in, for example, the work of American theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-58), who says in his *Discourse on the Trinity* that the Father and Son delight in each other and breathe forth the Holy Spirit in love and joy; and the Spirit being 'the love and joy of God is his beauty and happiness, and it is in our partaking of the same Holy Spirit that our communion with God consists' (Yale edn., p.130; he is not saying that beauty is to be ascribed *only* to the Spirit). He also interprets the traditional name of 'Comforter' as including giving delight.

Although East and West disagree on the procession of the Spirit, it is unclear how much this matters for our particular topic now. In any case, they both agree on what the Spirit's mission is in the world. So let me end by looking at more practical ways of approaching the tradition now.

## Issues for Us

(1) In Anglo-American philosophy over the last thirty years or so a lot of writers have returned to a serious consideration of the nature of beauty. Several of them regard beauty as a real property of things, albeit a supervenient one, i.e. it emerges from other properties, both aesthetic and non-aesthetic. Now if this view is correct, then it would seem the doctrine of Creation is one natural starting-point for religious people; and here we would need to give some account of the Spirit's role, as Irenaeus did briefly. But although there has been a huge outpouring of books on the Holy Spirit by theologians since around 1970, most of them concentrate on his place in the Trinity, Christology, and the Church; and more recently on spirituality and religious experience. But the Spirit's role in nature and culture is relatively ignored.

(2) When Edwards included 'delighting' under 'comforting', he was,



*Pentecost by Titian (Sta Maria Della Salute, Venice)*

I think reminding us that St Paul listed joy as one of the 'fruits of the Spirit' (Gal 5:22-3). Now many recent writers have complained of the absence of joy in much contemporary Christianity; and in an influential discussion of divine beauty Karl Barth, despite his reservations about ascribing beauty to God, wrote that if we ignore His beauty in His Triunity, 'we at once have a God without radiance and without joy (and without humour)...' (*Church Dogmatics*, II.i.661).

The reaction of joy or delight is naturally linked to other human responses like wonder and thanks; and writers like Gadamer and Moltmann have gone further by making connections with activities like celebration and worship. I merely suggest in conclusion that a consideration of aesthetic delight is one way of connecting up with such responses and activities, and also with the long tradition about beauty that I have briefly summarized.

# Pictures from the Ocean

Artist Fi Clark talks to  
Rebecca Irvine

I would describe my system of belief as pantheism. This is the term that most closely encapsulates my understanding that 'the holy land is everywhere' - where you stand, where your heart is - and also that god is in each of us. I was not raised in any particular faith: my mother was born a Catholic and my father came from a Scottish Non-Conformist background and they both had a passion for anthropology and mythology. This meant that I was brought up with loads of books around the house, on all sorts of belief systems.

My father adored Egyptology in particular and my mother was fascinated by Tibet and Japan - their enthusiasm was infectious. I grew up learning about these different world views and I still have a very clear memory of building a little Shinto shrine when I was about ten. Shintoism still has resonance for me because of its relationship to nature.

Maybe because of their very wide interests, my parents always stressed that it was up to my sister and me to decide on our own spiritual paths. It was a great introduction to religion and faith, and has informed my whole life.

Other pivotal influences on my faith include people like Ram Dass (previously known as the American academic Richard Alpert) who went on to study in the Hindu tradition before becoming a renowned teacher of spirituality and the mythologist Joseph Campbell whose Jungian perspective helped me examine the concept of religion as metaphor. Just as important were

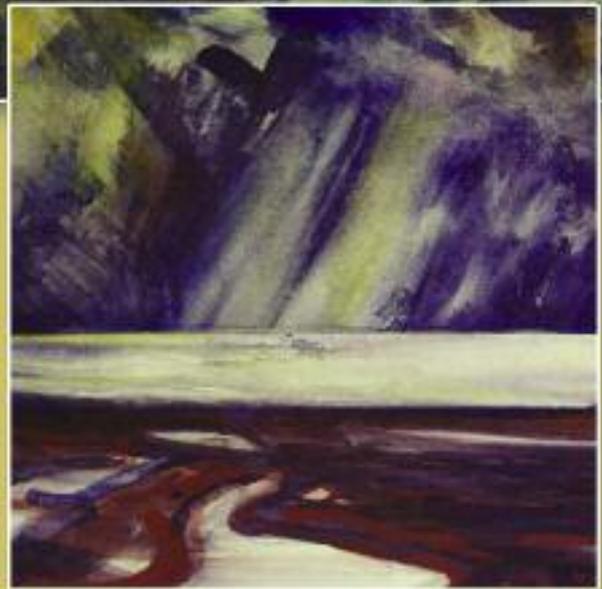
the writings of the Buddhist teacher Chogyam Trungpa: his work encouraged me to try to understand both the Wheel of Life, and the styles of entrapment.

Maybe because I studied so widely I never became a member of any particular tradition. At one stage, when I was in search of a formal practice for myself, I went on a Buddhist retreat held at Haileybury School in London. Beautiful as the retreat was, I found that my own way to experience the clear light of meditation was by walking in the woods surrounding the school. It was there that I got out of my own way, as it were! That is to say that I experienced a great oneness with the universe, without letting any other thought get in the way. It may be similar to one of the goals along the way of Zen practise: to be able to watch one's thoughts pass like clouds.

When I paint, I aim to reconnect with that universal consciousness. It's not so easy though! I have to reach beyond the lesser ego, the one that is always questioning whether I'm doing this or that *right*. This kind of narrow perfectionism is really just 'preciousness' and I know I can't afford it if I am to finish anything.

Instead, I have to agree with myself to make 'mistakes' and push my ego out of the way when I'm working. It is after all just the ego that has me imagining, when I'm drawing the first line, a crowd of people saying "oh, that's marvellous!" It's exactly the same thing, the other way up if, when I make a 'mistake', I pull myself down, stop working or backtrack. Instead of taking the option to enjoy the mistake, potentially, as an integral part of the whole. After all, the perfect image doesn't exist anywhere except in my imagination!





When I'm struggling I try to remember that it was my study of Zen calligraphy that eventually led me to paint as I do now. As a mark maker, I was fascinated by the very deliberate way the Zen masters spend so long grinding the ink. It's a process of meditation and clearing in itself, and eventually it leads them to be able to make a pure, clear movement with the brush – described beautifully by Anne Bancroft as *'direct pointing to reality'*. I think that's a great example to try to follow.

I also take inspiration from the way that planet earth has evolved: the mission of being human is to learn to love our world and the life it brings us, whatever it might entail.

I'd like to think that at best, my work transmits my understanding of life, or god, as an ocean. Out of the waves of consciousness we view life and we take our own little wave very seriously. Naturally then, as an artist, I think that the state from which I'm making any mark is crucial. I have to quiet my mind; extend the peace; silence the focus. It is only then that I can transmit to canvas my belief that all of nature, all of life, contains elements of the divine. We already live in paradise and we just don't notice it often enough.



# Belonging

When morning comes, I look out from my window,  
To verify the fond familiar scene;  
The lawn, the tree, the fence, my neighbour's garden,  
The tree-tops in the Park, of various green;  
The squirrel climbing high to seek her drey,  
The robin singing in my apple-tree;  
The blackbird searching there among the leaves;  
The flowers, and the droning humble-bee.

I am in this Land, and on this Earth.  
I am comforted, for all is well.  
This is my place.  
Here I belong.

When night falls, I look up and search the heavens,  
To verify the star-shapes overhead.  
Orion, with his two dogs at his heels,  
Confronts the angry Bull, with eye of red.  
Castor and Pollux watch them from below;  
The Herdsman turns to face the lumbering Bear.  
With outstretched neck, the Swan flies to the West;  
All shine in their allotted places there.

I am in this Galaxy, this Universe.  
I am comforted, for all is well.  
This is my place.  
Here I belong.

In time of quiet I use the inner eye  
To view that state which lies beyond all time,  
Where human space-time words shall lose all meaning,  
And I from flesh to spirit shall sublime,  
Free from need of self-defining space,  
Of Sun and Moon, and sense of cold and heat;  
But in the eternal glorious light of truth  
To know as I am known, and be complete.

I am in this Genesis, this Cosmos.  
I am comforted, for all is well.  
This is my place.  
Here I belong.