

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

February 2017

Dear Friends, Did you know that February is the last month of the Roman calendar but for the Irish the first month of Spring. Challenged by Wilf Hayler to find a poem about February, the ones I read were uniformly gloomy, mirroring the darkness of winter, and reminding me of the daily depressing news we hear on the media. Sometimes it takes an effort to look on the bright side.

So what a pleasure it was to go into meeting on the first Sunday in February, and see upon the table a bowl of primrose plants in full bloom, dug that morning by Cecily Taylor from her garden, that sign of hope and joy. We had later in the hour the reading below from George Fox

Gillian Turner

George Fox wrote to Friends in November 1663 during the time of much persecution: Sing and rejoice, ye Children of the Day, and of the Light, for the Lord is at work in this thick night of Darkness that may be felt: and truth doth flourish as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns, and the plants atop the hills, and upon them the lambs do skip and play. And never heed the tempest nor the storms, floods nor rains, for the Seed of Christ is over all and doth reign, and so, be of good faith and valiant for the Truth. Qfp 20.23

News of Friends

Peter Tayler, our Buildings Administrator, has been on the sick list for the last week or so. He has been able to continue monitoring the emails on our croydon.quaker email address and make bookings etc. While Gillian meets and greets, Will Bitten our bookkeeper opens and closes the meeting house supported by Gordon Spence. We expect Peter to be on his feet before long.

Anthea Underwood is back home after a stay in Croydon University Hospital and Barrington Lodge. She has now got an improved care package in place. Nirvana, her granddaughter visits her very frequently as does a neighbour who shops and does some housework. Kitty McVey and Rhiannon Rees visit and support also.

Celia Snaith is also on the sick list, having scalded her leg very badly. She is having it dressed every day.

Wilf Hayler is spending four weeks at the Bernhard Barron Homes in Polegate with a possibility that he might move there permanently. We look forward to reading his impressions of his stay when he returns.

We send all our friends our love and best wishes.

Fellowship

When I came to my first Quaker Meeting for Worship, the next day I said to a friend of mine: "I've found a living mystical tradition – *in Caterham!* You must come along next Sunday." And so he did and we both became members when we finished our academic education. I had been impressed not just by the mysticism, but also the loving community and warm welcome that we received.

I find that fellowship in a Quaker meeting has two complementary aspects. One arises from the inner mystical experience shared by a number of Friends that each intuitively recognises in the others which underpins an inner unity. I have experienced this and you will understand it if you have experienced it. This unity is universal and extends beyond the Local Meeting. You will be familiar with the words of William Penn:

"The humble, meek, just, pious and devout souls are everywhere of one religion."[†]

Tom Kelly* writes: "When our souls are utterly swept through and overturned by God's invading love, we suddenly find ourselves in the midst of a wholly new relationship with our fellow-men. We find ourselves enmeshed with some people in bonds of love, nearness and togetherness of soul, such as we never knew before." "Can this amazing experience of togetherness in love be

what men have called fellowship?" And I would ask if this is what is meant by "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit"?

The other aspect is a sociable community of pleasant mainly like-minded people who support each other and love one another. Both of these aspects of fellowship underpin and support Quaker projects and other charities.

In the early years of the Quaker movement the emphasis was the spiritual experiences of Friends. The inner fellowship formed and gave motivation to the development of the Religious Society of Friends of the Truth. To me, this "Truth" is the inner experience. It has many names: Inner Light, Presence of God, Presence of Jesus, Holy Spirit.

I have for many years studied a *little* book "Light on the Path that has had a *big* influence on me and I would like to close this article with a quotation from it:

"Look for the flower to bloom in the silence that follows the storm: not till then....."

Such a calm will come to the harassed spirit. And in the deep silence the mysterious event will occur which will prove that the way has been found. Call it by what name you will, it is a messenger that comes; a messenger without form or substance; or it is the flower of the soul that has opened. It cannot be described by any metaphor. But it can be felt after, looked for, and desired, even amid the raging of the storm. The silence may last a moment of time or it may last a thousand years. But it will end. Yet you will carry its strength with you. **Gordon Spence**

† Qfp: 19. 28.

*The Reality of the Spiritual World *and* The Gathered Meeting

First published in 1944, subsequently reprinted 1965 & 1996 ISBN 0-85245-283-7

Light on the Path – a treatise on spiritual discipleship. ISBN 7229 5006 3

Lift up the Stone

During the early Christian era, church authorities were formulating doctrine and protocol and various gospels and papers were considered as being suitable for the transmission of the message. Some pieces were not found acceptable for inclusion in what would become authorised texts owing to their supernatural nature or Gnostic content and many documents were destroyed with only scattered remnants remaining. Gnostic Christianity embraced the belief that direct knowledge of God is possible as the true Self of everyone and the Divine are the same. ("Gnostic" translated into English by the word "knowledge").

In 1945, a farmer in Nag Hammadi, a village in Egypt, discovered a pottery vessel in which were found thirteen documents written in the Coptic language. The manuscripts, buried untouched in the sands for 1600 years, contained teachings of great spiritual power attributed to Jesus. They had been written in the fourth century A.D. and were sold eventually to the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Interestingly, one of the papers was presented to the great psychoanalyst and philosopher, Carl Jung. Three of the manuscripts were photographed and published in 1956, one of which was the Gospel of Thomas. Over the years, in some quarters, fierce controversy has surrounded the provenance of the manuscripts.

The wonderful Friends Fellowship for Healing pamphlet, *Lift up the Stone*, by Mavis E. Timms, explains that, unlike the four gospels which are more familiar to us, "the Gospel of Thomas is a collection of sayings with no linking storyline to divert attention from the real issue - the inner meaning of the teachings." The Gospel puts forward the idea that each person is responsible for his or her inner journey and spiritual development and that "the discovery and nurture of the divine seed at the heart of each one of us is the prime object of our life on this earth".

Concepts such as the individual's need and right to seek union with God, or Truth, and a sense of affinity with all of Creation did not sit well with the theological, social and political views of the day. Officials keen to protect and control their extensive power-base were not happy to accept such non-exclusive and universalist ideas. Unsurprisingly, such teachings were deemed heretical.

The sayings and mini-parables in Thomas are said to be:

"The words which the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote".

One section, or Logion, deals with the necessity of seeing what is before one, as the disciples ask Jesus:

" When will the Kingdom come?"

Jesus answered, "It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look here! Look there!' Rather, the Father's Kingdom is spread upon the earth and people do not see it."

This essential teaching is, of course, as ancient as time and its spiritual truth and influence has pulsed through the ages across the world. In January, at our monthly Meeting for Upholding, we shared the following examples:

From the Bhagavad-Gita (written in Sanskrit, possibly second century BCE):

"I am the origin of this world. I am the taste in the waters; I am the light of the sun; I am the sound in the ether and the manliness in men. I am the pure fragrance in the earth, and brightness in the fire. I am the life in all creatures".

Meister Eckhart (German Dominican priest and mystic 1260- 1328):

"Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things. Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God. Every creature is a word of God. If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature - even a caterpillar - I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature."

Hildegard of Bingen (German Benedictine Abbess and mystic 1098-1179):

"I, the fiery life of the divine substance, blaze in the beauty of the fields, shine in the waters, and burn in the sun, moon and stars. And, as the all-sustaining invisible force of the aerial wind, I bring all things to life".

Timms asserts that the rediscovered text of Thomas "is describing the universal Way to inner Wholeness". It offers a vision of love, self-healing and inner harmony. Hugh McGregor-Ross, the late, famous Quaker, computer scientist and expert on this Gospel, felt that the teachings were "made up entirely of short, highly concentrated sayings, each with an outer form and deep inner meaning". The symbolic language reaches directly to the spiritual being at the centre of each of us.

Timms reminds us that Hebrew prophets often spoke as the transparency for God, the Creator Spirit. "The light illumines all things and gives them life and Being. All things proceed from the creative consciousness and eventually will return".

Jesus said:

"I am the light which is over everything.

I am the All, and the All comes forth from me,
and to me the All has returned.

Split wood: I am there.

Lift up the stone, you will find me there."

(Logion 77)

Barbara Earl

Lift up the Stone, Mavis E. Timms (Friends Fellowship for Healing)
The Gospel of Thomas, Hugh Mc Gregor-Ross

[Parker Palmer and The Undivided Life](#)

We've all got a favourite writer who says so well all the things we'd like to say ourselves - if we had thought of them. This writer is the one who identifies an issue, sorts out the jumble of ideas surrounding it to make it coherent and then moves the train of thought along the track in a meaningful way. As members of the Monday afternoon study group cannot avoid knowing, Parker Palmer is this kind of writer for me and to whom I endlessly (and that really means endlessly) refer.

To those unfamiliar with his work, Parker Palmer is an American Quaker writer, who has a PhD in Sociology from the University of California at Berkeley. During his working life, he spent over ten years at Pendle Hill, the Quaker retreat near Philadelphia. He has written many books and articles and is the founder of the Center for Courage and Renewal. His main focus is on the possibility of living a life that is both reflective and active, the link between an individual's inner spiritual life and how he or she conducts their work life in the external world, in their community. He has used the metaphor of the piece of material called a Möbius strip. A Möbius strip is easily made. A strip of paper is twisted and its ends are then fixed together. For all the twisting you'll find that there is only there is only one surface as you run your finger along the strip's surface. Essentially there is only one side, and that's the point that Parker Palmer is making about life. The inner and external lives cannot be separated. They are both part of the same thing. In short, life can't be compartmentalised. A reflective life does not mean that the individual should withdraw from the real world, working in his or her community, coping with it all –



the good and the bad, the triumphs and the disappointments – just getting things done. The key idea in all this is for the individual to find their inner capacity to – and here are some key words – to lead an authentic, meaningful and resilient life.

It's easy to see why Parker Palmer's books (and the Center's activities in the USA, in the UK and Europe) are geared to and popular with teachers, social workers, health care professionals and all those who are facing and coping with difficult and complicated issues. How do you keep going on when you're overworked, exhausted and disillusioned? How do we link with and be supported by a community of truth? Parker Palmer speaks to our condition and encourages us to cope with our illusions by abandoning them and in so doing strengthen our desire for positive feelings about the future. Work, education and deep individual learning are more than performance management with its predicted and dictated outcomes. Life is ambiguous and paradoxical. But it can also be full of joys and companionship. As Parker Palmer might say, approached as a project in undivided living, in the company of others, it need not be overwhelming.

Palmer, Parker J. (1983, 1993) *To Know as We are Known: Education as a spiritual journey*, San Francisco: Harper

Palmer, Parker J. (1998) *The Courage to Teach, exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Palmer, Parker J. (2000) *Let your Life Speak: listening for the voice of vocation*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Parker, Palmer J. (2004) *A Hidden Wholeness: the Journey toward an Undivided Life*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Center for Courage and Renewal: <http://www.couragerenewal.org>

Helen Johnson

Death and Dying

The London Quakers event at Friends House on 28 January was, to my surprise, organised by the University of Cardiff. The link was Anne Hosking, Clerk of Cardiff Meeting, who is involved with the group Quaker Concern Around Dying and Death. Also very much involved in the event was an organisation called Compassion in Dying. The Small Meeting House was packed, not only with Quakers.

There are three things we can do well in advance to prepare for our final illness and death: an Advance Directive (formerly called a Living Will), Lasting Power of Attorney, and Will. A Will does not take effect until your death, and until then your family, or 'next of kin', have no legal status although they may be consulted by the medical profession. So it helps everyone if you can make clear in writing what your wishes are, in the event of becoming terminally ill or unable to make decisions for yourself.

A theme that came through the Conference was that prolonging life is not necessarily the kindest thing to do. Eva Kalmus (Sutton Meeting) was one of the speakers and talked about her experience as a doctor in an acute hospital – she had witnessed a very distressed patient whom the nurses were struggling to deal with. Eva insisted on their freeing the patient from all the invasive tubes and sending her back to her care home to die with dignity.

It is illegal to take actions to terminate a life deliberately, but it is not illegal to withhold treatment and allow nature to take its course, when someone is near death anyway. If 'assisted dying' is made legal, it will be with safeguards, e.g. only for those with capacity to make the decision for themselves, and who are terminally ill. Sometimes sedation may accelerate death but it may be the kinder option.

A Will is mainly about how you wish your assets to be distributed after your death, although it may also say, for example, whether you wish your body to be cremated.

Lasting Power of Attorney – there are two types, Health & Welfare and Financial. They can be made at any time but only take effect when they are registered. They enable someone, appointed by you, to act for you in your best interests if you become unable to act for yourself, e.g. if you suffer from dementia or are physically seriously disabled.

An Advance Directive is a document regarding the circumstances in which you would want medical treatment to be withheld. It is legally binding – a copy should go to your GP and you should make your family aware of its existence. (This used to be called a 'Living Will', but living

wills made before 2005 may no longer be valid.) The organisation Compassion in Dying can help you to draft an Advance Directive - see www.compassionindying.org.uk

Most people die in hospital, although this is not necessarily what they would prefer. It means that we rarely see people die, so death is not something we talk about. Perhaps that should change – it is the only certainty in life!

Barbara Cairns (Epsom Meeting)

Learning Lessons from the Past to Create a Safer, Better Future

On Friday 27 January Rhiannon Rees, Mary Jakeman and I attended the very well supported Holocaust Memorial event at Croydon Town Hall. This date marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp. The civic ceremony began with an introduction by the Mayor, Cllr. Wayne Trakas-Lawlor, and powerful words regarding the emotional legacy for many of the individual families whose relatives had endured the Holocaust from Marilyn Arbisman from Croydon Synagogue. The lighting of candles and a period of silence followed. A Book of Remembrance was then signed after the Leader of the Council's speech.

Each year there is a theme for the day, and for 2017 we are asked to consider "How can life go on?" How, indeed, does life go on after the human catastrophe that is systematic and bureaucratic genocide? Or after the endurance of unimaginable cruelty inherent in a regime that has been described as the death of empathy? This Memorial Day not only asks us to remember and honour those who died in the Nazi Holocaust and subsequent genocides such as Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur but also prompts us to stand with the survivors. What are our responsibilities to our fellows in the aftermath of such crimes?

Elie Wiesel, writer and teacher, Nobel Peace laureate and survivor of both Auschwitz and Buchenwald, wrote that, "even in the midst of darkness it is possible to create light and share warmth with one another; that even on the edge of the abyss it is possible to dream exalted dreams of compassion... that even in exile, friendship becomes an anchor".

The second part of the event took place in the Council Chamber and included performances of poetry and Rwandan dance on the year's theme by local school children from Riddlesdown Collegiate, Meridian High and Oasis Academy, Coulsdon. Members of the Croydon Community Choir led the audience in a moving rendition of a poignant song about resilience in the face of immense discord and great problems entitled: "I Feel Like Going On". Singing together as one provided a release for the strong emotion arising from the thoughts and feelings as the programme unfolded.

Two survivors of the Holocaust addressed the gathering, each with a unique story of loss and endurance to relate. Marcel Ladenheim, whose father died in Auschwitz and whose grandmother disappeared never to be heard from again, spoke about his memories of being a child in France during the war. After his mother was hospitalised, he was taken in by two female neighbours, whose act of bravery led to his survival. Eventually, he was sent to school in Manchester and later studied to be a dentist.

Henry Walsh, who had moved to Austria and the Sudetenland to flee from Hitler's regime spoke about his eventual escape on the Kindertransport, the rescue scheme which operated between 1938-40, which enabled children to be placed with foster families in England. Interestingly, a large proportion of the hosts who welcomed Jewish children were Quaker families. Henry and his brother went on to be pilots in the RAF and the Royal Navy.

Both of these most honoured guests provided us with emotional and impactful testimony regarding the individual realities behind the Holocaust. Indifference to the treatment of others is, according to Wiesel, "the epitome of evil"; "silence encourages the tormentor," sometimes we must interfere".

Martin Niemoller, a Protestant pastor, who, as an outspoken critic of Hitler, spent seven years in concentration camps, wrote:

First they came for the Socialists, but I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist,

Then they came for the Trade Unionists but I did not speak out because I was not a Trade Unionist,

Then they came for the Jews, but I did not speak out because I was not a Jew,

Then they came for me - and there was no one left to speak for me.

Holocaust Memorial Day asks us to think about the part we can play in challenging hatred, racism and discrimination in order to create a kinder and safer world for all.

Barbara Earl

Yearly Meeting Gathering: A Reminder

29 July – 5 August at Warwick University

Every three years we hold a Yearly Meeting Gathering, an event which brings together Friends, friends and families for an exciting week of community, fun, worshipping and working together. There will be business meetings, outings, lectures, workshops, singing, talking, swimming, knitting, dancing, new friends, old friends and fun. There are the Young Adults at YMG, Junior Yearly meeting, Children and Young People's Programme, all taking place at the same time.

Booking opens on 4 January and closes on 30 April. You should book online via the Quaker website at www.quaker.org.uk/ym or phone 020 7663 1040 to be sent a form. If you wish to be accommodated as a group the whole group must be booked and paid for at the same time.

If you require a bursary please alert Overseers who will advise you (Veronica Double is clerk of Overseers). If you are considering attending please tell Elders (Liz Collins is clerk of Elders).

The theme concludes our three-year consideration of Living out our Faith in the World, working with Others to change the World.

The Spiritual Preparation document will be sent out in early April and Documents in Advance in May. If you would like a printed copy of all the details of booking, cost and dates, and any other information, please speak to Godfrey Turner, a member of the clerking team.

“Friendly Persuasion”

On 26 February our fourth Sunday event will be a showing of the classic 1956 film *Friendly Persuasion*, starring Gary Cooper, Dorothy McGuire, and Anthony Perkins. In case you've forgotten, it's the story of a family of Quakers in Indiana in 1862 who find themselves not entirely in unity on how best to uphold the peace testimony when Southern troops pass through the area. It's a long film, running at just under 2 hours and 20 minutes, so we hope to start at 12.20 and break for lunch about an hour later. We should finish at about 3.30.

Quaker Retreats

Stay at the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham. Woodbrooke offers a variety of short courses on spiritual growth, theology, creative arts, and training for Quaker roles. The centre is very accessible by public transport, The accommodation is excellent and the gardens spacious and well kept.

A stay at Woodbrooke is always a pleasure. There are bursaries available.

Diary dates

Breakfast every Sunday morning from 9 to 10 am.

Please join us for porridge, toast and coffee. Coffee available until 10.15

Saturday 11 February: Second Housing Day: Friends House, 10:30 to 16:00. A follow-on day from the very successful day on 20 February 2016. This one will concentrate on what can be done, and look at items such as community land trusts.

Saturday 11 February: Digging the Dirt (Ealing) 16:00 to 18:00, Ealing meeting house, 17 Woodville Road, London W5 2SE. Two-person show by Multistory Theatre Company. It's the tale of people standing up for what they believe. One is based on the Digger movement of 1649 which saw a group of people striving to create a more equal society by occupying common land. The other is about a whistle-blower within the intelligence service who attempts to halt the invasion of Iraq in 2003. What do you give up in the name of freedom? How far do you compromise to protect your principles? Free, contributions to expenses invited.

Sunday 12 February: Croydon local business meeting From 12.15. All welcome.

Sunday 19 February: Area business meeting from 12.30 at Sutton meeting house. Details to follow.

Saturday 25 February: Prayer and Healing (Kindlers) 10:00 to 16:30, led by Frances Crampton & Gill Sewell, Friends House. An experiential day to open the spirit. Prayer will be expressed in a variety of forms as we explore our desire for healing, thanksgiving and help. Second of five Spring 2017 Saturday workshops in London. Come to any of them, or come to them all. Journey into the heart of the Quaker Way.

Sunday 26 February: Friendly Persuasion: see above.

Sunday 26 February: Digging the Dirt (Westminster) 14.00 - 16.00, Westminster. (See above, Saturday 11th.)

Saturday 4 March: Digging the Dirt (Brentford & Isleworth) 19.00 - 21.00, Brentford & Isleworth meeting house. (See above, Saturday 11th.)

Saturday 18 March: Local Quaker websites – inreach and outreach Friends House, 10:30 to 16:00. A non-technical day to look at how we might improve the websites of UK local meetings, area meetings and recognised groups. Please contact Keith Walton (keith.a.walton@gmail.com or 07806 663023) if you'd like to attend.

Collected in January

1 Quaker Work at Home and Abroad **£83**

8 South London Area Meeting **£58**

15 Woodbrooke **£10.95**

22 Croydon Local Meeting **£64**

29 Friends Family Group **£69**

Collecting in February: **5** Tommy's, **12** Quaker Work, **19** South London AQM,
26 Timanne School, Nairobi

The deadline for the February edition is Sunday 26 February 2017
Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to Gillian Turner Tel 020 8688 9659 email gillianturner033@gmail.com