

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

July-August 2020

Dear Friends, This should be the last newsletter written during lockdown. The rules are easing; people are able to go back to work or come out of furlough or shielding and can gradually re-adjust themselves to a former way of life. Our next edition will be at the beginning of September, by which time we hope to be meeting for worship in person, whether in the meeting room or the Adult School Hall. At time of writing we hope to open for worship in August.

Advices and Queries 41

Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. Do not be persuaded into buying what you do not need or cannot afford. Do you keep yourself informed about the effects your style of living is having on the global economy and environment?

News of Friends

Anita Bennet, we're pleased to report, is safely home after her accident and operation.

Brian Skeet celebrated a birthday on 3 July – but not by being punted by Gordon Spence. The picture (right) was taken well before lockdown.

Future meetings

At a recent Zoomed meeting of elders and overseers we were joined by Gillian on behalf of Premises Committee. The following minute by Pam Sellman has been sent to Helen Drewery as Clerk of Trustees:

'We discussed the pros and cons of opening up in July, but the general feeling was that we should aim for Sunday, 2 August. That will give time for completing preparations for the Meeting House and ASH [Adult School Hall], depending on which one we wish to use. (ASH could be used in July but the feeling was that it is better to aim for 2 August.) Premises are arranging things based on the two metres rule as we have vulnerable Friends and, therefore, if we use the Meeting House room we could have only 14-16 people attending Mfw - more could be accommodated in ASH. Of course, a lot depends on what the Government guidelines are at the end of July.

'A risk assessment needs to be completed before opening and Elders need to look at the steps for communication (in the 'Nine Steps' document that was forwarded to us). We will need to keep lists of those attending Mfw as part of the Track and Trace requirements.

'During July it is hoped to use the Meeting House common room during the week for small gatherings (10 max) meeting for coffee and socialisation.'



Even more about lockdown

Three or so months ago, lockdown was announced and we all – well, most of us – complied. After all, staying out harm's way seemed very sensible. (David's letter to *The Friend*, 19 June 2020, put it wonderfully: he wants to live adventurously but not die recklessly).

It is easy to assert that most of us did so because it seemed self-evidently the right thing to do. In a sense it was an individual decision, especially if you're over seventy and hoping to stay alive for a bit longer. If you're like me and live in a multi-generational household – young people

upstairs and the oldie downstairs – there was also the fear of infecting others, especially the wee ones. In short, we've behaved ourselves - and it was not so much doing what we were told but more a matter of it being our choice.

However, things change and, with change, it is possible to reflect on how to interpret what has been going on - and our participation in and response to it. Do I even understand what the rules are as they seem to change on a daily basis? Have I been compliant because I felt I *had to* do what I was told? Are there other things going on in society where government is starting to behave, well, at best, oddly? It's a question that opens up the far bigger one of why you and I behave in society in the way that we do.

Of course, once that individual decision is moved out to the community and society as a whole, it's necessary to consider the impact of officially sanctioned and enforceable rules. So, we all live in our own bubbles but *why* do we behave in the way we do? In short, are we participants or active supporters in this decision-making and its implementation or just conforming subjects? And does it matter? One instance of responses to authoritarian decision-making that has been much studied is the role of writers in Nazi Germany in the 1930s. There were (1) those who actively supported the regime, (2) those who sought exile abroad, and (3) those who were involved in something called inner emigration. In short, the latter were the ones who kept their heads down and didn't publicly protest about or oppose what was going on. More recently, inner emigration has taken on a wider meaning to be a description of a sort of mental dissociation from one's country or the situation that you find yourself in.

For what it's worth, it's my guess that most of us go along with a lot of things that government does because they seem reasonable. I guess the difficulty arises when it is necessary to distinguish between free will, refusal and acquiescence. (Are we starting to move down that ominous path?) Fortunately, Quakers – as explored in the recent PBS documentary, *Quakers: the quiet revolutionaries* (thanks, Kitty) with its particular focus on Quaker anti-slavery and peace campaigning - as a group have a long history and experience of making that distinction and taking appropriate social action.

Helen Johnson



Community vertical herb garden at the end of Birdhurst Ave (photo: Liz Collins)

Book Review
Emissary of Light: A vision of peace
 James F Twyman

Native American Prayer for Peace
O Great Spirit of our Ancestors, I raise my pipe to you.
To your messengers the four winds,
and to Mother Earth who provides for your children.
Give us the wisdom to teach our children to love, to respect, and to be kind to each other
so that they may grow with peace in mind.
Let us learn to share all good things that you provide for us on this Earth.

This prayer is one of the 12 'Peace Seeds' – prayers for peace from different faiths – which introduce each chapter of this book. I found it an intriguing and inspiring read overall. I'd picked it up from the table in the Croydon Quaker Meeting House where people used to leave things they wanted to pass on. For much of the book, because the crux of it was so fantastical, I desperately wanted to know who'd left it there so I could ask them 'Did it really happen?!' In the end, I concluded that it did.

It's a powerful story set in Croatia and Bosnia in the 1990s. James Twyman is a young American musician and singer of deeply spiritual mindset – a peace troubadour - and is invited to take part in a Peace Concert in Sarajevo during the civil war. The brief trip planned takes many turns and becomes an adventure, physical and spiritual, and includes apparently a modern-day ascension (though not our hero's). James was born a Catholic but has grown into a respect for all denominations and faiths and a vocation to work for peace through music. He's refreshingly un-pious and refreshingly honest and human, and for me this helped ground all the strong spiritual teaching that the book is a vehicle for. Published by Findhorn, the spiritual message was emphatic that humankind was now overwhelmingly ready for the world to become a place of peace, and I felt some scepticism about this, rightly or wrongly, it felt a bit New Age. Perhaps that's my staid thinking putting unnecessary limits on things, though!

Sitting above the constraints of individual faiths there are no scriptural references (apart from the 12 Prayers), and the teaching is specific to anyone interested in peace and spreading it, starting with cultivating peace within. The core message is that to increase peace we need to release fear. (This spoke to me particularly since realising over the last few years that fear's a reflex, when anticipating a variety of situations, and that it's damaging.) The key to releasing fear is gratitude. And reiterated many times: there is no separation between us and the 'One in the Centre'. A rare denominational/faith diversion comes when James accidentally finds himself in Medjugorje. Visions happen in all religions, especially in times of violence and strife, and speak to the people whose belief filter makes it acceptable to them. He's not the first person to say this, but the way he explains it seemed especially neat and obvious. There's a wholeness, a wholesomeness in the author's inclusivity that I found nurturing and healing.

The message of course is that we are all called to develop as Emissaries of Light. If you'd like to read this book, I can pass it on. And if you left it on the table, I'd love to find out what you made of it!

Sikh Prayer for Peace

God adjudges us according to our deeds, not the coat that we wear:
that Truth is above everything, but higher still is truthful living.
Know that we attain God when we love,
and only that victory endures in consequences of which no one is defeated.

Katharine Locke

James F Twyman, *Emissary of Light* (1996, Findhorn Press, 229pp)

Be Patient Towards All That is Unsolved

Aspects of our economy and culture in what can be a high-speed, demanding and disposable world encourage the expectation of the immediate gratification of material needs. Digital citizens use text, email, chat rooms, internet shopping, discussion forums, online games, social media,

fast food apps, e-ticketing, and more, to provide the means of ensuring that desires are met. This transfer of information, communication and services is undoubtedly immensely useful and has changed the way we live and do business. What's less clear is whether any of these systems are helpful in the development of qualities such as humility and patience which remain so essential to life in general and difficult circumstances in particular.

In periods of challenge, it is understandable that many are drawn towards the attainment of absolute solutions when it is wiser perhaps to live alongside the times and accept and adapt to some of the realities of a less than ideal situation. In a recent *Evening Standard* article, Matthew d'Ancona put forward the idea that to weather the present crisis it is best to temper our over-sharpened expectations and 'distinguish hope, which is necessary, from impatience, which is perilous.' He goes on to explain that our 'culture of impatience robs us of perspective'.

The Ancients, of course, have much to say about the importance of patience. Lao Tzu, who wrote the *Tao Te Ching*, his instruction for living, on bamboo in archaic Chinese about twenty-five hundred years ago, asks:

Do you have the patience to wait till your mind settles and the water is clear? Can you remain unmoving till the right action arises by itself?

Lao Tzu advises the release of the hard, grasping search for certainty:

*I have just three things to teach:
Simplicity, patience,
Compassion.
These three are your greatest treasures.*

He goes on to recommend that if we are patient with both friends and enemies we accord with the way things are. In addition, if we are compassionate towards ourselves 'you reconcile all beings in the world'. Setting this kind of intention on a daily basis can only be of help in uncertain and difficult times. Letting go of distorted ideas and unrealistic expectations may throw a different light on life.

This development of patience is not a passive act, it requires concentrated attention and an easing or softening of the will. To paraphrase Walter Lanyon, nobody can see patience but s/he sees the manifestation of it. In the early part of the twentieth century, many, many years after Lao Tzu, the Bohemian-Austrian novelist and poet Rainer Maria Rilke replied to a young cadet who had asked for advice:

Make your ego porous. Will is of little importance, complaining is nothing, fame is nothing. Openness, patience, receptivity and solitude are everything.

He continues that it is wise to be patient towards all that is unsolved as it is not possible to seek answers that cannot be given. Instead, Rilke suggests:

Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

Rilke's responses to the young cadet's questions are valuable in helping us to process both personal and global questions which arise in response to events unfurling in strange and disturbing ways.

Our own George Fox knew for sure what it was to live through the upheaval of turbulent times, a 'world turned upside down', and despite having had a great deal of personal experience of considerable struggle he was convinced that there was no need to battle alone. His words to a very distressed Lady Claypole, Oliver Cromwell's daughter, offer balm to us now as surely as they did to her in 1658:

Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blustering and storms (QFP 2.18)

Barbara Earl

The Tao Te Ching – Lao Tzu (Version by Ursula Le Guin) (Shambala)

Letters to a Young Poet – Rainer Maria Rilke (Norton)

A Temple not Made with Hands – Walter Lanyon (Kessinger Legacy Reprints)

Some readings during Lockdown

Most of us promised ourselves to improve our minds with serious reading during lockdown, and catch up with all those unread or half-remembered books on our shelves. Those who stayed for the zoom Fourth Sunday discussion group talked about that very subject. The discussion ranged from those who decided not to read anything particularly challenging but to browse old favourites to those who took up the challenge, finished and wrote a book review. Here are examples of both.

The last few weeks of Covid 19 have been difficult for me to settle into 'serious reading' which I promised myself I would do. I have found that browsing through my bookcases rediscovering some poetry was rewarding for me. I enjoy children's poems, A Milne a favourite, but...

This is one I keep coming back to :

Percy Bysshe Shelley : Love's Philosophy

*The fountains mingle with the river
And the rivers with the ocean,
The winds of heaven mix for ever
With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the world is single,
All things by a law divine
In one another's being mingle-
Why not I with thine?*

*See the mountains kiss high heaven
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister-flower would be forgiven
If it disdain'd its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea-
What are all these kissings worth,
If thou kiss not me?*

Margie Ashley

Claridge House

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As a person who seems to have been shielding since the old king died (to coin just one of my late grandmother's phrases), my thoughts have turned to memories of simple pleasures such as having coffee with Friends and visiting Claridge House in Dormansland, near Lingfield. While Friends and relatives long to get back to Ibiza and Tenerife, I would be happy to get myself down to Surrey to stay in the 12-bedroom, (with en suite now!) Victorian house with its beautiful garden which has been in the tender hands of the Friends Fellowship of Healing since 1954.

At the end of my teaching career when I was ill but didn't yet know it, visiting this house got me through my toughest days. After a particularly strenuous Ofsted inspection, I would phone to book a weekend of rest and renewal. The receptionist would ask, 'But what course do you want to do?' I would answer that I didn't care! The need to be there in such a healing atmosphere overrode my choice of subject. That's why I can speak at length on topics such as Yoga, the Healing Energies of the Voice, The Tao Te Ching and Kirtan singing.

Claridge House introduced me to Quakerism when I was lucky enough to do some courses with Jim Pym on *In Tune with the Infinite* by Waldo Ralph Trine and *The Infinite Way* by Joel Goldsmith. After these, I never looked back. Next stop, Croydon Meeting House.

The House offers rest and recuperation for those in need of a personal retreat and B+B for those who are keen to explore the surrounding area with its many National Trust properties such as Standen House and Chartwell.

Food at the house is locally sourced, organic and vegetarian. Tea at 4pm with home-made cake is much-loved tradition. The two quiet times each day which take place in the library provide shared spiritual points of meditation. On Sundays a Meeting for Worship is held for residents and members of the local community.

When it reopens I hope to visit as soon as I can. The drive to Lingfield is not too strenuous, or there is a train from Victoria or East Croydon.

Bursaries are available from Claridge House or speak to your Overseer.

Barbara Earl

Events

Sunday 12 July: Croydon meeting for worship for business (by Zoom)

Brummana High School

Friends reading this newsletter may wonder why we have an annual collection for a school in far-off Lebanon, and indeed why we regularly give to their annual bursary appeal.

The school was founded almost 150 years ago by a Swiss Friend under the care of Britain Home Service, which, despite its name also cared for meeting in Europe. The school survived during the 14-year civil war, but then, at the end of the 1990 began its expansion as a school which included international students and teachers, and maintained its commitment to Quaker values of peace and equality. Britain yearly Meeting was invited to return, particularly to oversee with the school's financial affairs, and British teachers and managers joined the staff to help it to expand and develop.

Several Croydon and Area Meeting Friends went during that early period, and in 2004 Godfrey and myself joined the staff. The years we were there, either full or part time, were dominated by unrest, the murder of the prime minister, car bombs, civil unrest, and in 2010 an invasion from Israel when there was an exodus of everyone who held a passport from another country.

The school survived, and now, under the headship of a British principal, is one of the top schools in Lebanon. However, the country is once again undergoing a breakdown of cataclysmic proportions, with rampant inflation, the overthrow of the government, rioting, and great suffering. The school, high up overlooking Beirut, has carried on teaching during lockdown and plans to reopen in September. The future is uncertain, but children need the security of an education which will enable them to rebuild their country and to carve out a safe life for themselves. Bursaries depend on our giving, in the knowledge that it is safely held by the Quaker International Educational Trust (QuIET), whose members are in close contact with the school and who love it as much as I do.

Please make a payment via our collection schedule <http://croydonquakers.org.uk/collect.php>.

Gillian Turner

Collections

Collecting in July: 05 Area Meeting, 12 Claridge House, 19 Croydon LM, 26 BYM

Collecting in August: 02 The Retreat York, 09 Croydon Refugee Centre, 16 Croydon Local Meeting, 23 South East Cancer Help Centre, 30 Mind in Croydon

The deadline for the September edition is Sunday 2 September 2020
Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to
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My Plants

In the morning, my Lord, I offer you praise
 as I water my plants set out in their trays,
 as I think of their roots, to make the plant strong
 and I feed on your Word, which never is wrong;
 as I look at the leaves, turned face to the sun
 may I look towards you until this day is done,
 as I admire the bright flowers giving glory to you
 may I bring pleasure in the things that I do.
 As I look at the fruit, tasty and sweet,
 may I taste of you to the people I meet.
 As I think of the seed, hidden away,
 may I plant one seed for you on this day.
 In the morning, my Lord, I offer you praise
 as I water my plants set out in my trays.

*Simpson, Roy, compiler, Celtic Daily Light:
 A Spiritual journey through the year,
 Reading for June 22, Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1997
 Read by Joyce Trotman at meeting for worship on 28 June*