

Gracevine Online: September 2010

The Interfaith Foundation Newsletter



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Table of Contents

1. Editorial	Page 2
2. Divorce Testimony	Page 3
3. Am I Fit To be An Interfaith Minister	Page 4
4. Poem – Guide Me Into An Unclenched Moment	Page 5
5. Gaia, God and Gardening	Page 6
6. Poem – Green Tara	Page 8
7. An Invitation to the Reader	Page 9
8. Reflections on a Baby Blessing	Page 11
9. Love	Page 11
10. Spiritual Direction – Part 3 of 3	Page 12
11. Terry Waite, Peace Envoy, Visits Woodheys Primary School	Page 15
12. Notices	Page 16

Editorial by Sarah Flynn

Beloved Ministers

Welcome to the September edition of Gracevine. Once again, another edition full of inspiration and so much Love! I so enjoy putting each Gracevine together because I come away from the process full of wonder and new energy. There is so much that each of us has to offer to the world and the content that is so generously provided by those who write for Gracevine is testament to that.

And I know you too will feel inspired once you have read Stephen Wright's last of three articles on Spiritual Direction and an account of the transformational effect of a divorce ceremony. I am sure you will also enjoy Nigel Lees' article on how to see your garden as a reflection of Gaia – the living spirit of the Earth, Lesley Bradley's account of how painting Icon's has revitalised her spiritual life and Elaine Walker's beautiful reflections on a baby blessing.

The deadline for the March edition is 16th February 2011. Please do not feel you need to wait for this deadline. Write when you are inspired and then send your contributions in whenever you are ready to.

I wish you great enjoyment in reading this edition and my grateful thanks go to everyone who contributed.

I love to receive feedback about what is included here. It really helps me to know what you enjoyed reading, what else you would like to see included. You can email me at with any comments and suggestions.

May your Autumn be full of good things.

With blessings and love,

Sarah

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You must have control of the
authorship of your own destiny. The
pen that writes your life story must be
held in your own hand.

Irene C. Kassorla

Divorce Ceremony Testimonial 21/2/10 *submitted by Jane Coulthard*

I hadn't really planned on having a full scale divorce ceremony. The idea was to go out for a meal with some girlfriends and have Jane, my Interfaith Minister, say a few words at the beginning about freeing myself from the past and embracing my new life.

Jane agreed to do this. Having thought it over however I realized that a restaurant might prove a little restrictive. Jane breathed a sigh of relief. We decided to hold a small ceremony in my house before the meal. That's that I thought – all sorted. Then the emails started coming from Jane and the phone calls – did I want this or did I want that? That's when I realized that this wasn't a 'divorce ceremony on page 6' type of thing. It was my ceremony and as such I needed to think about what sort of ceremony I wanted it to be.

So with Jane's help I set about choosing readings, songs, prayers and thought about what I wanted to say to my ex even though he wouldn't be present, because this wasn't just about me. It was about him too and, of course, the children who sometimes get forgotten in all the hurt and upset of a divorce.

'Think about the things you can be grateful for in the life you shared with your ex.' said Jane. Now that was a tough one. We get so caught up focusing on the negatives of a relationship that we tend to blot out the good times.

Jane and I talked about mutual forgiveness because if I wanted to set myself free then I had to set him free too. All those grievances needed to be shown to the Light and dispersed. As my ex was still in a poignant place I needed to do it for both of us.

So the day of the Ceremony arrived and it did indeed feel like a special day. I assured my 18 year old son who didn't want to attend, not being into that 'psycho spiritual stuff' that it wasn't a 'divorce party' more of a marking a rite of passage. He still didn't want to attend but wished me well. My 15 year old daughter was particularly looking forward to pizza afterwards.

Jane welcomed everyone. We said prayers, we sang my favourite hymn 'Glad that I live am I'. I acknowledged the children's inevitable pain even though they had put on very brave faces, looked after both of us when we needed it most and stuck doggedly to the 'staying with which parent tonight' rota. They are the gifts from my marriage that I will be eternally grateful for.

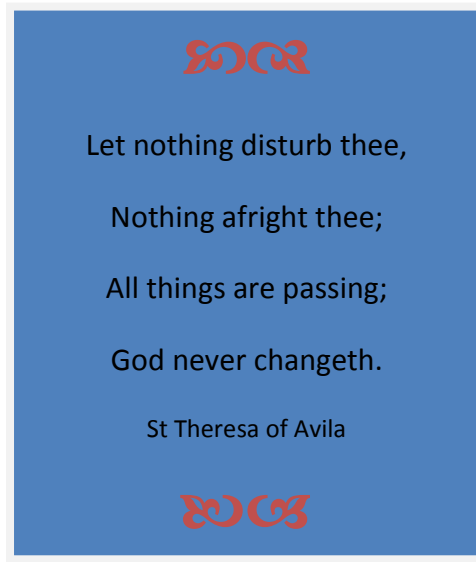
Then came the hardest part for me – talking out loud to my ex, telling him I had forgiven both him and myself and asking him to forgive. It really felt like I was talking to him which after 3 years of virtually no contact even though we live 5 minutes apart was so powerful I got all choked up. I hadn't bargained on that happening. I noticed my friends dabbing at their eyes too. Apparently it was bringing up issues for them in their own relationships. My beautiful daughter held my hand through it all.

But it wasn't all tears and raw emotion. We lightened things up by singing 'Always Look On the Bright Side' from Life of Brian and my daughter read one of her favourite poems called 'Smile'. We lit candles and we danced to Dr. Alban's 'Alleluya' while trapped in a group hug. Then it was finished. Over so quickly it seemed, even though it had lasted at least 45 minutes.

Then there was a glass of sparkly wine and off to the Ask Restaurant for a pizza. As I looked around the restaurant table at my daughter and my very close friends I was overwhelmed that they had chosen to be with me this day. And just as the marriage had been given due honour all those years ago, I was glad that I had been given the opportunity to honour the parting of the ways.

One of my friends at that table had recently separated from her husband. She sent me a text afterwards which I found so poignant: 'Thank you for inviting me. I was totally unprepared for the immensity of emotions. Makes me realize how much armour I have put around myself and how much I have to unravel when the time is right! I am pleased for you and how far you have come.'

I am so grateful to you, Jane, my Interfaith Minister, for making it all possible and continuing to be my friend through thick and thin.



Am I fit to be an Interfaith Minister? by John Mason

My attention has been drawn recently to something written by that highly evolved White Witch, Starhawk, in her seminal work *The Spiral Dance*, which has relevance to us as practising ministers.

Before I retired, I had occasion to attend management seminars and workshops and one of the aspects of effective management that we were taught was to keep one's commitments. The reason commonly given was that, if you are late in keeping appointments, for example, you send a message to the person you are meeting that you have something more important to do than the meeting you arranged.

While that may be true, there is something else going on. Clearly, as ministers, what we are doing when we create a ritual, is creating a magic ceremony. The rationalists among us might shy away from such words, but magic is what we should be aspiring to do and what we **are** doing. It is the only explanation for that special atmosphere we create which results in not only the participants, but more particularly the witnesses, coming to us afterwards with complimentary words which express wonder at the atmosphere and energy created during the ceremony.

Starhawk¹ draws our attention to this and gives a wider reason for keeping commitments. She writes: -

The practice of magic demands the development of what is called the magical will. Will is very much akin to what Victorian schoolmasters called "character": honesty, self-discipline, commitment and conviction.

Those who would practise magic must be scrupulously honest in their personal lives. In one sense, magic works on the principle that "it is so because I say it is so." A bag of herbs acquires the power to heal because I say it does. For my word to take on such force, I must be deeply and completely convinced that it is identified with truth as I know it. If I habitually lie to my lovers, steal from my boss, pilfer from supermarkets, or simply renege on my promises, I cannot have that conviction.

Unless I have enough personal power to keep commitments in my daily life, I will be unable to wield magical power. To work magic I need a basic belief in my ability to do things and cause things to happen. That belief is generated and sustained by my daily actions. If I say I will finish a report by Thursday and I do so, I have strengthened my knowledge that I am a person who can do what I say I will do. If I let the report go until a week from next Monday, I have undermined that belief. Of course, life is full of mistakes and miscalculations. But to a person who practises honesty and keeps commitments, "As I will, so mote it be" is not just a pretty phrase; it is a statement of fact.

The ramifications of this seem to me to be very wide.

¹Starhawk *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* 1979, 1989, 1999. New York Harper Collins p138

Guide Me Into An Unclenched Moment *submitted by Ingrid Scott*

Gentle me,
Holy One,
into an unclenched moment,
a deep breath,
a letting go
of heavy experiences,
of shrivelling anxieties,
of dead certainties,
that, soften by the silence,
surrounded by the light,
and open to the mystery,

I may be found by wholeness
upheld by the unfathomable
entranced by the simple
and filled with joy
that is you.

From *Guerillas of Grace*
by Ted Loder

Gaia, God and Gardening *by Nigel Lees*

Gaia, Mother of all, the oldest one, the foundation, I shall sing to Earth.
(part of) The Homeric Hymn to Gaia

Gaia or Ge (hence **ge**ography, **ge**ometry, **ge**ology) is the Greek name for the Earth goddess, the 'Great Mother', who emerged fully formed out of the sea of chaos and eventually gave birth to all the other gods. To the ancient Greeks the Earth was Gaia, to be revered and to be considered sacred. Gaia is also the name of a new holistic scientific theory of a self-regulating Earth.



James Lovelock, a British atmospheric chemist, was working for NASA in the 1970s on the Viking project which was looking for life on other planets, notably Venus and Mars, when he developed his idea of the Earth as a self-regulating principle, **the Gaia Hypothesis**. Earth's atmosphere is far from stable being liable to many changes and fluctuations. Contrast this with Mars and Venus with little weather fluctuations at all, atmosphere comprised mainly of carbon dioxide, and essentially dead. Earth by comparison is full of life and full of very reactive oxygen (21%) balanced by a more inert nitrogen (78%) and smaller percentages of other gases (carbon dioxide, methane, argon). He came to the conclusion that if you want to see if life possibly exists elsewhere in the universe then look at the atmosphere of the planet. Why is it, he asked, has the Earth's atmosphere essentially remained stable for over 300

million years with only slight fluctuations? His insight, and this was a big leap forward, was to suggest that *life* itself plus all the environmental chemical reactions and geophysical movements, somehow kept the Earth in balance. How is it that the sun has become 25% hotter over the past 5 billion years whilst the Earth's temperature, again, has not fluctuated wildly? Many scientists criticised Gaia theory as being teleological, that is, attributing to it a sense of divine purpose, direction and knowledge, and hence not a scientific theory at all. In other words the Earth 'knows' what it is doing. Lovelock, however, never intended that Gaia be thought of a 'being or entity' but that is just what has happened in some circles. This has led many in the environmental and ecological movements to develop a spirituality in tune with Gaia.

So what is our relationship to Gaia and to God?

The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship – Ralph Waldo Emerson

On the face of it there should be no relationship between a scientific theory and 'The Divine'. But is our Earth, this rock we live on, in any way divine or just a reflection of the divine energy which we feel created 'All That Is'? There are some similarities. Gaia still supports us and has done so for 4.5 billion years, during which time life developed, struggled, survived, struggled, thrived, changed, struggled and evolved, until consciousness in the form of human beings emerged. We now know that the Earth appears to continue to support us, via a system of ecological cycles and feedbacks, seemingly without any God-like interference.

So does this theory exclude God? Some theological beliefs describe divinity as pantheistic, that is: God and the universe are one and the same substance. Many indigenous and native forms of spirituality could be described in this manner, where even the rocks are described as 'our relations'. Many aspects of Hindu religious traditions could also be described as pantheistic although there is a transcendent quality here as well. That the Earth is sacred (and Lovelock also believed this) there can be no doubt. It is, though, a matter of personal belief whether you think the Earth is just a creation, an artefact, of God, or whether you think it is of the same substance as God. Could it be both? However, we can 'awaken' in the spiritual sense to Gaia as we understand her today: Ecologist Stephan Harding at Schumacher College often talks about being *Gaia'ed* which is the sudden awareness or realisation that we are in the presence of something much greater than ourselves. Though this relates to being outside and in nature, the similarities to other spiritual experiences are apparent. We are in *relationship* with the Earth and can come into



contact with her through our senses, feelings and our emotions too. However through Gaia and holistic scientific discoveries about how our Earth keeps us alive we can also glimpse the immanence of the Spirit in all her glory and in all her forms from tiny single cellular organisms to the majestic Kauri tree; from the grains of sand to Uluru (Ayers Rock); from the patterns formed in boiling mud pools to the swarming of starlings just before nightfall. Knowing that there are scientific explanations for the wonders of nature can help us see

the 'otherness' that motivates all of life and far from leading us to a state of nihilism only increases the sense of our place in the universe.

...And gardening

Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them - A. A. Milne, said by Eeyore from 'Winnie the Pooh'

For those of us who want to get close to the Earth, there is perhaps no better or easier way than that spiritual practice we call gardening. The big Gaian principle of life and the material environment working together to keep the Earth in a sort of excitable or active balance, drills down to the small gardening experience. It's called compost: the universe in a barrel. Nothing is really



wasted, everything that dies and decays can be used again to feed and nourish the living. Gaia knows that without death there can be no life, and this is what a gardener knows as well. This is Gaia's version of reincarnation. The seed dies and becomes the plant. The Earth exists because of cycles in time and space: the carbon cycle, for example, helps keep carbon dioxide at just the correct percentage in the atmosphere (though human effort is sorely testing this) just as the cycle of decay helps nourish the soil.

Given time a garden will come into balance. What was once just a lawn and a few brightly coloured flowers can become an oasis for birds, bees, hoverflies, butterflies, moths, frogs and millions of bacteria, fungal spores and other organisms. Once you start providing the garden with habitat, flowers that the insects and birds want, a pond and good compost, then you can see a transformation. If you keep digging to a minimum then the natural mycorrhiza ('invisible' fungal network in soil) provides most plants with the nutrients they need. A garden in balance does not mean that so-called harmful insects are all destroyed, but that they cause far less damage, for example, to your vegetables. Gardens, however, are all artificial constructs, like most of the UK landscape, and are human's attempt to control nature. The best we can do is work with Gaia rather than against her. Keep your garden untidy and everything will find its place. Trust and patience is what you need to cultivate: trusting that your garden wants to be in active balance (though not in a deadening equilibrium) and the patience to wait for it, see it develop, cherish the intermediate stages, smile at the failures and cry with joy at the successes. When you see movement in a garden, bees collecting pollen, butterflies drinking nectar and birds feasting or splashing in a pond, *then you have a garden in tune with Gaia* and seeking to find that ecstatic balance that is the lively spirit of nature.



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Green Tara by Nigel Lees

Green Tara
Leafy Tara
Organic Girl
Growing pains

Tutare Tutare
Not 21 but One
Dissolving into nothing
Well, that's something

Om Tare Tare
I have a dream
Of what I dream
Ask Green Tara

Tara loves green garden
Healing as she grows
Protecting the green
Bright shining star

Tara sees the unseen
She makes a wish
The boys see the birds
Make a haven for bees

Green Tara
Scented goddess
Break the walls
That divide us.

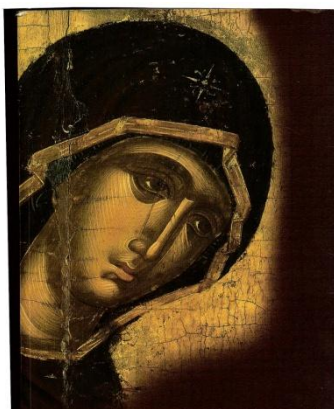
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An Invitation to the Reader by Lesley Bradley

Dear Reader

In autumn 2005 I was weighed down with counselling work. I needed a break, to do something completely different. Being a great believer in Adult Education, I enquired for Friday afternoons, the only time I had free, and so attended Iconography. I could say this is how I came to be painting icons, but in fact this is how they came to me. I was also studying an MA that suggested images and the force of imagination itself are invitations to the Divine. It fitted together neatly. So I discovered theoretically, and experienced personally, how very precisely the making of an icon is also the transformation of the maker. Of course this has been known for at least fifteen hundred years, but to me it was new, fresh and very exciting. The Eastern Orthodox Church often uses the term 'door of perception' to describe an icon and so it proved to be: a new perception of my sense of faith, spiritual life and everyday practice.

With Icons pulling me back to my spiritual beginnings in Christian theology and imagery I realised a terrible thing, when I had revised and renewed my relationship with God, and moved away from 'delivered religion' as I called it, I had thrown the baby out with the bath water – I had thrown away my sacred images. They were not so easily remodelled. They had an internal architecture with atmosphere, colour, depth that was entirely their own. They were a route straight back to my own spiritual development *as it happened at the time*. I would hear myself say things like 'Oh I remember the first time I saw...' **That** experience had to stay vibrant to keep me alive to other spiritual opportunities. Until iconography came to me I had muted the images and kept the 'Door of perception' closed. I kept searching for the key but could not find one. When handling the wood for the first icon I realised that there was no key. It is not my door to open, all I had to do was **knock**.



You do not have to be a Christian to see that this face of Mary is of a style called 'Loving Kindness' or see how you could spend time contemplating it. (From an icon at the Holy Monastery of St. John the Baptist, Kareas, Attiki, Greece, probably 16th century by an unknown writer) or the agony on this 'Lamenting Virgin' from Monastery of the Transfiguration, Meteora. 14th Century.

There is something in submitting to the demand from the icon with the work solely in its tradition, and **without reservation**, *even if* it is no longer my way, *in its entirety*. What a struggle! Engagement here is on the icon's terms. It takes a leap of faith to embrace this request. All I could do was hand it over to God. I was too hooked to walk away as I had done with 'delivered Christianity' and then something wonderful happened: somehow this faithfulness, this obedience to the image, as opposed to the doctrine, was not constrictive but passionate and spacious. It allowed an embodiment so unexpected it remains my delight.

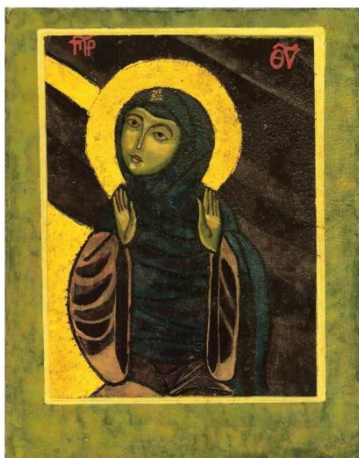
I need to explain that icons are not simply painted in the usual sense, they are 'written' to be a visual expression of the Word of God given the high levels of illiteracy throughout history. There are a number of specific artistic conventions that provide the spelling and the grammar of the language, for example the forehead is considered the seat of intellect and wisdom (hence the term highbrow) and so the forehead of the image is usually disproportionately large; the collar bone is emphasised denoting the gateway to the heart, indicating the love of God that the person had, but also God's love for you the viewer. In this way the viewer as the reader of the image is invited into the phenomenology of this relationship by the realisation that if this love happened between the human depicted in this image and God, then it can also be made



manifest for you. This sets up a movement which includes the viewer, calling him or her to prayer, to move from being a viewer to being a contemplative, to pray with them. You begin to participate in their story and you learn, feel, embody and move closer to God.

For the writer it is also an invitation to spiritual transformation, the offer from the icon is overt putting it on a different level to other works of art. The icon exists within a specific context, defined in two ways. Firstly the setting within which it will be viewed with the attendant liturgical offering involved; secondly the rituals and practices embedded into the actual construction of the icon. Without these contexts it ceases to be its true self. How much further did I need to look for a metaphor of life, particularly spiritual life? I had wondered how I could put back the structure without feeling crowded in or restricted in the formalities of the various places of worship I had tried. I use all the knowledge of the icon as my guide. There are 7 steps to writing an icon – such a symbolic number – and this is my structure.

There are many styles of painting icons, like there are many styles of people. The analogies go on and on. Mine are Russian or Byzantine depending on the icon and the teacher. But I could go on. For another time perhaps.



In the mean time, Dear Reader, for *your* viewing is my first Icon which is of Mary, a portion of an icon copied in a different style from the original by Stephan Rene (www.copticiconography) from his 'Annunciation' - ho hum! -. When I look at her now I am filled with gratitude, though it is very clear that she is my first!

This is in the Prosopon (Russian style) and is The Virgin Hodigitria – the one who points the way ie. Pointing to Jesus.



My latest Jesus – Christ Pantocrator, sometimes called 'The Blessing Christ' most usually 'the Ruler of All' in the Byzantine style. This is not the best image of me! Though catch the ones on the wall behind.



For more by my present tutor, religious and musical legends go to www.petermurphyicons.co.uk.

So, Dear Friend, we finish. If you wish to know more please just approach and ask. Just remember that next time you walk past an image of sacred art and stop to look and contemplate. It may seem that you saw, you stopped and you communicated, but really it saw you and knew you needed to stop a while and hear what it had to tell you. It had been waiting for you. With Love, Lesley

Reflections on a Baby Blessing by Elaine Walker

Late August and the apples were ripening on the tree. A table stood beneath their branches, holding a glass bowl of water with rose petals floating on the surface. Wildflowers decorated the table.

Here we gathered to bless a baby boy, not yet 4 months old. His soft, white cotton gown was made from his Norwegian grandmother's wedding dress. It was long, with names and dates embroidered on the skirt. Careful chain stitch in blue spelled out the baby's father's name and a date in 1973. Beside this was a woman's name and 1975 in pink. This was the baby's aunt. And under that were two more names of her children.

The silver-haired grandmother sat in a haze of joy and pride for this her family. She was the only one left of her generation - head of this little clan.

The baby boy beamed at the bees lazily circling the apples and waved his hands at the leaves rustling in the summer breeze. I said the words, the guests listened and nodded and smiled. We prayed, and then it happened.

The baby's father, at my invitation began to speak directly to his son. The infant looked deeply into his father's eyes with complete understanding. In that timeless moment each person felt the depth of love that flowed from father to child. Tears rolled down the cheeks of the guests, men and women. Then the father kissed the downy head of his son and the Baby Blessing continued.

But in that brief moment everything had changed. There was a softening, the air sparkled, the earth held us more safely. There was no doubt in my mind that we were in the presence of something beyond our comprehension.

Afterwards we had champagne and some people laughed. Some people were still tearful and asked in wonder, "What happened?" "What was that?"

They looked at me in expectation.

"Love," I said.

"We have no idea of its power."

LOVE submitted by Ingrid Scott

Love all of God's creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand.

Love every leaf, every ray of God's Light!

Love the animals, love the plants, love everything.

If you love everything, you will soon perceive the divine mystery of things.

Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day.

And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Spiritual direction – Part 3 of 3 by Stephen Wright



Some years ago I attended a meeting with the Dalai Lama in Manchester. He is a deeply holy man and any questions I had just dissolved as I fell into a couple of hours of sunbathing in his presence. At one point he was asked a convoluted question about relationships by a young man, specifically the struggle he was experiencing in his marriage. The audience was hushed, expecting a profound response. He thought for a while then said “Ask an expert!” I warm to teachers like that who have the humility to know the limits of their expertise! Wise spiritual beings are not necessarily wise in all things, and they know it.

The Buddha is famous for his exhortation to his followers – “Be a lamp unto yourself.” But he did not intend this as a license to go off and do our own thing in the spiritual search without restraint or guidance. He was encouraging his followers to be acutely aware of false prophets, gurus and teachers. George Fox, the main driving force behind the establishment of the Quakers in the 17th century, was motivated in part by the ossified state of the beliefs and practices of the established church. He was regularly and often angrily challenged (and imprisoned) when people would quote scripture at him in an attempt to dismiss his ideas. His response, when people would say “The Bible says this,” would be “But what sayest thou?” Like the Buddha, he saw it as wrong to follow any person or belief system blindly, but to bring the light of our own reason, our lamp, to shine upon them – to expose the truths and the deceptions. The words of Jesus have often been used to justify the repression of “sinners” in all manner of quite horrendous ways, yet there was no greater iconoclast than him when confronted with the fundamentalism of his time.

The Sufi tradition has an interesting tale to tell about the healthy approach to spiritual guides in the “Donkey and the Mullah”. “Mullah” in Islam is a title of respect meaning teacher or scholar on religious matters. Mullah Nasrudin is associated with an unconventional approach to teaching others about their uncritical attachments to persons or beliefs. Nasrudin borrowed a neighbour’s donkey one day and the neighbour called at his home some time later to ask for it back. Nasrudin denied that he had the donkey, only at that moment for the sound of braying to be heard at the back of the house. The neighbour heard it and demanded its return. Nasrudin, faking a shocked expression, asked indignantly “Would you take the word of a donkey over the word of a Mullah?”

A healthy spirituality is cautious about taking on board the advice of authority figures uncritically. But it can take courage to listen to advice of our own heart and trust our own knowledge and experience. In all faiths it is taught that we must not accept blindly but use reason and enquiry. St Paul, for example, in his many letters often advised followers to test. “Test everything” (Thessalonians 1.5:21) he says, echoing the Buddha. The moral of the Sufi tale like the Buddha’s caution is simple, be very wary of trusting authority figures. Believe the donkey not the Mullah! Beware of making Gods of people. All of us are of God and in some the veil of the ego has become so thin that they seem to shine with Divine light. But they are of God, not God. The One, the whole, the sacred unity within and around each of us is to be honoured and worshipped, not the aspect that bears it, no matter how wonderful our “guru” or any other person we happen to meet might be.

Those of us who work in spiritual direction can find ourselves being treated as gods by the vulnerable and hungry people we encounter. That’s one reason why, in our community, we have a code of conduct and a requirement to submit ourselves to ongoing supervision. “Who directs the directors?” is an important question to answer if we, as spiritual directors, are not ourselves to be seduced when others might look up to us and slip from respect into worship, or when such

seductions play into those unresolved ego desires in ourselves for power. Many years ago my teacher Ram Dass fiercely resisted the guru title and would deliberately play with me and shake my perceptions of him if he saw that I was putting him on a pedestal. “I still shit and pee like everyone else,” he said, and reminded me that failing to see the ordinary humanity of the spiritual director is not only unhealthy for the directee, it is also for the director too.

The intention in spiritual direction is to help people find their way Home by inner exploration and guidance through the minefield of spiritual awakening. Through the process of testing and discernment, the spiritual director, the soul friend, helps the directee see differently and ever more clearly. In many ways the relationship with the director can mirror the relationship with God, constantly calling us to go deeper.

There is a hunger in all of us to deeply know ourselves and our place in the scheme of things, to be happy, to love. That journey into knowing is not one to be undertaken lightly or alone. Knowing ourselves more deeply and our connection to that which is both part of and yet beyond the self informs who we are in the world, what work nourishes us and how we should relate to others. Being in spiritual direction is one of the ways we can come to know and heal ourselves and our relationship to God. As such it is a pathway for us to become more integrated human beings. As we transform our relationship to God under the sensitive and loving guidance of our spiritual director we find a wealth of love there to draw upon in our search. Indeed it is almost as if we may albeit temporarily leapfrog some aspects of our concerns in the world or with ourselves. We can spend a lifetime picking over the wounds of the ego. But it may be that by prioritising our relationship to God we can look afresh at ourselves, from a different perspective. While, as I have suggested in this series, there is some strength in doing the psychological work first, the demands of the ego can be legion. While it is not possible to bypass the emotional work we can sometimes put it aside for a little while and dis-cover the Divine that has been waiting for us. Thus strengthened and renewed we find we have a far greater resource of love to draw upon to heal and to give a different perspective on those old wounds, or maybe even the wounds don't really seem like wounds any more anyway.

If humility is a key quality of the spiritual director, it is something that requires lifelong cultivation. Without it we run the risk of falling into the traps of our ego agendas. Let's take a look at the way we listen. If we are preoccupied with our own stuff, trying to listen while at the same time assessing and framing a reply, these are barriers to deep listening. We can't do all these at the same time as *really* paying attention to someone in need. Thus, in countless situations we “just miss” and an opportunity for human connection is lost. Listening at this deep level does not come easy and is rarely arrived at simply by life experience. It takes courage - to halt a conversation and ask for a moment's silence to reflect, to hold a space while a prayer is offered for guidance and clear thinking, to learn approaches such as meditation which can offer us insights into who we are and what makes us tick and which enable us to “be in the moment” – setting our own stuff to one side so that we can be absolutely there for the other. In ordinary conversation we may rarely listen deeply because we are already busy with our own interior plans, assessing what to do, how to respond or keep control of the situation. It is not possible to listen fully when we are already engaged in preparing a reply. Our culture is replete with superficial communications where we fall into games of emotional ping-pong, with the players at a safe distance never really connecting with each other.

If spiritual directors are to avoid this pitfall we need to be well rounded human beings who can see beyond the masks that we present to each other. This requires a commitment to spiritual practice and expansion of our consciousness that connects us to the deep peace and safety that lies in our very essence, our souls. Without this spiritual maturity we are afraid to operate other than behind our masks and roles, for who on earth would be left if we let them drop even for a little while? To switch off the demanding self so that we can pay close attention and witness the drama at play requires, for most of us a wholly (holy!) different way of being in the world. When we can confidently set aside our ego agendas, we can get ourselves out of the way. This enables us as listeners – arguably what the director spends most time doing and being - to put behind us our own views for the duration of the ‘listen’. By doing so we are able to give complete attention to the

speaker and the whole context in which the speaking is happening. In the process we have a brand new experience: by not interrupting or arguing we hear things that we have never heard before. The speaker in the relationship too will have a brand new experience. He or she will be aware of being heard by someone who is not going to come back with a reply, criticism or opposition. Not only are directees thus heard by the director, they also hear themselves.

[As an aside, here at the Sacred Space Foundation, we have found the use of the Enneagram profoundly helpful in spiritual direction and not just because it offers directees such deep insights into their own souls, but also because it is such a valuable springboard for relationship. It gets people talking about themselves and their stories, showering illumination on themselves as they do so. Thus the Enneagram can get people listening and seeing themselves as never before, it becomes a medium for exploration between director and directee. Indeed working with the Enneagram becomes a form of soul work in its own right, a sort of spiritual director's toolkit in your pocket! I'd recommend the Enneagram to anyone who has not yet embraced it. A group of Interfaith Ministers have been exploring their Enneagram with us here, but I've moved to the view that Seminary might integrate this approach for students right from the start.]

One of my favourite writers on the theme of spiritual direction (Margaret Guenther: "Holy Listening") sees the importance of learning to "pay attention, to listen to what is not being said (or to what is being said but minimised) and to learn the art of "waiting" and "asking the right questions" rather than having the right answers. Giving space to speak enables the person to feel. The use of silence, waiting, getting the self out of the way and ensuring the (sacred) space for the other to speak enable a deeper quality of listening to take place that can truly promote healing, understanding, compassion and connection. In working with a group of seminary students recently, as their supervisor, I was struck by how many were unsure about silence and waiting, how they tended to want to fill the gaps and how, with encouragement, they learned the power of embracing such ways of being in spiritual direction.

"I do nothing and nothing is left undone" Ram Dass said to me. It has taken me some years to understand what he meant by this. Now, being with people whom I encounter for healing, in whatever forms it takes, I have learned that I do nothing. I may choose a word or use my hands in a particular way, but these are all outer gestures of something deeper taking place. The Soul Friend learns to let go of his or her agendas and other people's dramas, to get the ego out of the way and trust in God. Spiritual direction to me is simply prayer in action, my work, if it is work at all, is to stay connected to the Divine, to open myself to grace and just let it do its work – I am not the doer, simply the instrument of the doing, the friend of the Friend. And this is a kind of effortless effort. In this loving, prayerful, mindful state the soul friend does not get caught up in the effort of trying to fix us, does not become exhausted trying to heal the world's wounds. Director and seeker mingle mutually in the vast ocean of Friendship, the sacred waters of our becoming and both ultimately flowing deeper into God.

I cannot recall coming out of a session with a client/directee (having tried "friend", "guest", "student" etc. I've never yet found a satisfactory word – maybe we should have a competition for new terminology!) and not felt nourished and blessed myself by the presence of the other person and God. I have a hunch that the day I stop seeing that mutual spiritual feeding at work is the day I should pack it all in.

[A few parts of this paper are taken from Stephen's book "Coming Home". His most recent publications "Burnout" (an advisory booklet for spiritual directors) and "Song and dance for the way home" (a collection of devotional chants with CD) are available from www.sacredspace.org.uk]

Terry Waite 'Peace Envoy' Visits Woodheys Primary School *by Laura Daniels*



When Terry Waite visited our school on Wednesday 12th May 2010, the first thing we noticed about him was his height and deep voice. We held an assembly for him and he told the children about his time in captivity, which had us all mesmerised.

Pam Evans, the creator of the Peace Mala, presented Mrs Daniels with a Peace Mala candle. Mr Waite then lit the candle together with Luke Galloway and Amelia Pepper from the Peace Club and Terri (his name sake) from Year 2.

Mrs. Daniels then took Mr Waite and the rest of the guests, together with the Peace Club members to walk the Labyrinth, where Mr Waite unveiled the Peace tile made by Sharon and Claire from Altrincham College of Arts. Mr Waite then buried a Peace Stone under the Peace rose next to the Labyrinth. *by Jenna Galloway and Olivia Creely*

Woodheys Primary School was one of the first 3 schools in the UK to be awarded 'Peace Mala Schools Accreditation' for its Interfaith and Diversity projects with the local community.

Laura Daniels, the head teacher of Woodheys Primary School, with the backing of Trafford Local Authority's main officers, is coordinating an educational 'Peace Mala festival of Interfaith and Culture' at Gorton Monastery on October 4th 2010. Terry Waite, after visiting the school, has agreed to be the guest of honour at the event.

Through working with Peace Mala, Mrs. Daniels met Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Cape Town, South Africa who agreed to wear the Peace Mala double rainbow Interfaith bracelet (the central white bead represents you, whether you have a faith or not). Mrs. Daniels is using her parental links, Altrincham Interfaith Group contacts and inductions made via her two year training with the 'Interfaith Foundation' to create the cultural family mix for the event.

What is Peace Mala?



Pam Evans – Founder of Peace Mala

Peace Mala is an award winning project for peace that I began in 2001, in response to the racial and religious bullying of pupils in my school that came out of the 9/11 aftermath. A Peace Mala is a symbolic double rainbow bracelet that promotes friendship, respect and peace between people of all cultures, lifestyles, beliefs and none. It cuts through every type of prejudice and celebrates what makes us different from each other. It is a vision for the future. Wearing the Peace Mala is a promise to help create a more tolerant and compassionate world.

'Mala' is a Sanskrit word and means 'garland of flowers'. In the East a mala is a string of beads used in meditation or prayer as each bead or 'flower' focuses on a prayer or mantra. The rainbow beads on the peace mala focus on the golden rule 'Treat others as you would wish them to treat you'. They also represent humanity in all its glorious diversity and Divine potential. May the Peace Mala journey continue as we work together to create a global family of peace.

For more information: www.peacemalafestival.co.uk, www.gortonmonastery.co.uk, <http://www.peacemala.org.uk>, www.woodheysprimaryschool.co.uk





Peace Mala Festival

of Inter-faith and Culture

Guest of Honour: Terry Waite CBE

The Monastery Manchester

Monday 4th October 2010

The Feast of Saint Francis

*"The Monastery is a joy:
its elegance and beauty
enhance every event that
takes place there,
and inspires people with
a sense of celebration
and goodwill"*

Dame Joan Bakewell

www.themonastery.co.uk

www.peacemala.org.uk

*"Creative education that empowers and embraces all
uniting World Youth"*

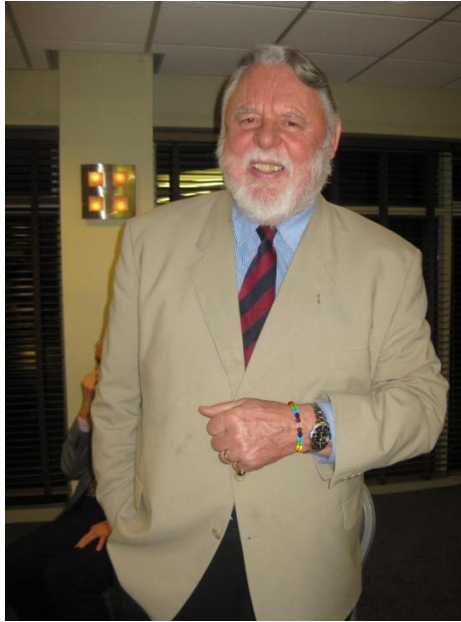
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Endorsed by

His Holiness The Dalai Lama of Tibet & Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

Terry Waite CBE

Hostages Negotiator, Humanitarian and Author



Terry Waite wearing his Peace Mala with pride

“Ignorance is a factor that paves the road to violence and warfare. When opportunities are provided for young people to meet with and understand those who differ from themselves then the seeds of tolerance and peace are planted.

Peace Mala provides such opportunities. The ancient Sanskrit word 'Mala' means 'a garland of flowers'. I should like to see flowers bloom not only in the United Kingdom but across the world. It is better to make a garland than to break a life”.

We are delighted that Terry Waite will be the guest of honour at the Peace Mala Festival of Inter-Faith and Culture in Manchester on 4th October 2010.

Terry Waite has led a remarkable life as a diplomat and a humanitarian. A world-renowned agent of peace, he is a testament to the power and resilience of the human spirit. Long devoted to humanitarian causes, inter-cultural relations, and conflict resolution, Waite garnered international recognition in the 1980s when, serving as a special envoy to the Archbishop of Canterbury, he successfully negotiated the release of hostages in Iran and Libya.

In 1987, while negotiating the release of hostages in Beirut, Waite was himself taken hostage. In captivity for 1,763 days (four years of which were in solitary confinement), he was chained to a wall, often left in darkness, beaten and subjected to a mock execution.

In his lectures, Waite gives audiences a perspective of world affairs founded on open communication, cooperation and a deep understanding of diverse cultures. There has been a particular interest in the lectures he has delivered relating his experiences as a negotiator and hostage to the pressures faced by executives and managers.

Stress, loneliness and negotiating under acute pressure are but some of the issues with which he has unique experience, and his ability to communicate clearly and with a good humour has placed him in constant demand as a speaker not only to the business community, but also to professionals in social work, education, medicine, and religious groups.

Terry Waite is President of Emmaus for the Homeless, joint founder of YCARE (International Development) and joint founder of Hostage UK.



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