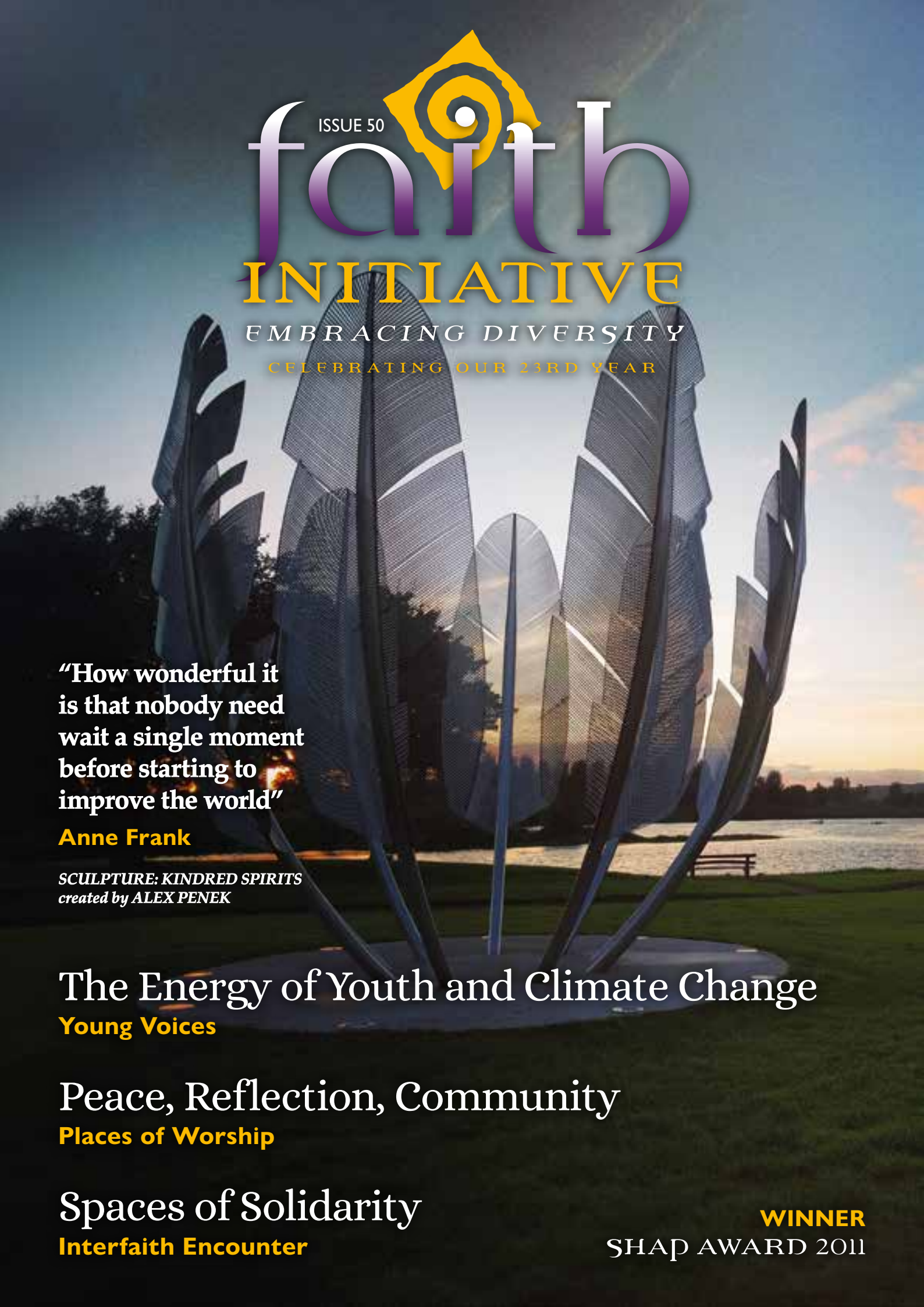
ISSUE 50

faith INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

CELEBRATING OUR 23RD YEAR



"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world"

Anne Frank

SCULPTURE: KINDRED SPIRITS
created by ALEX PENEK

The Energy of Youth and Climate Change

Young Voices

Peace, Reflection, Community

Places of Worship

Spaces of Solidarity

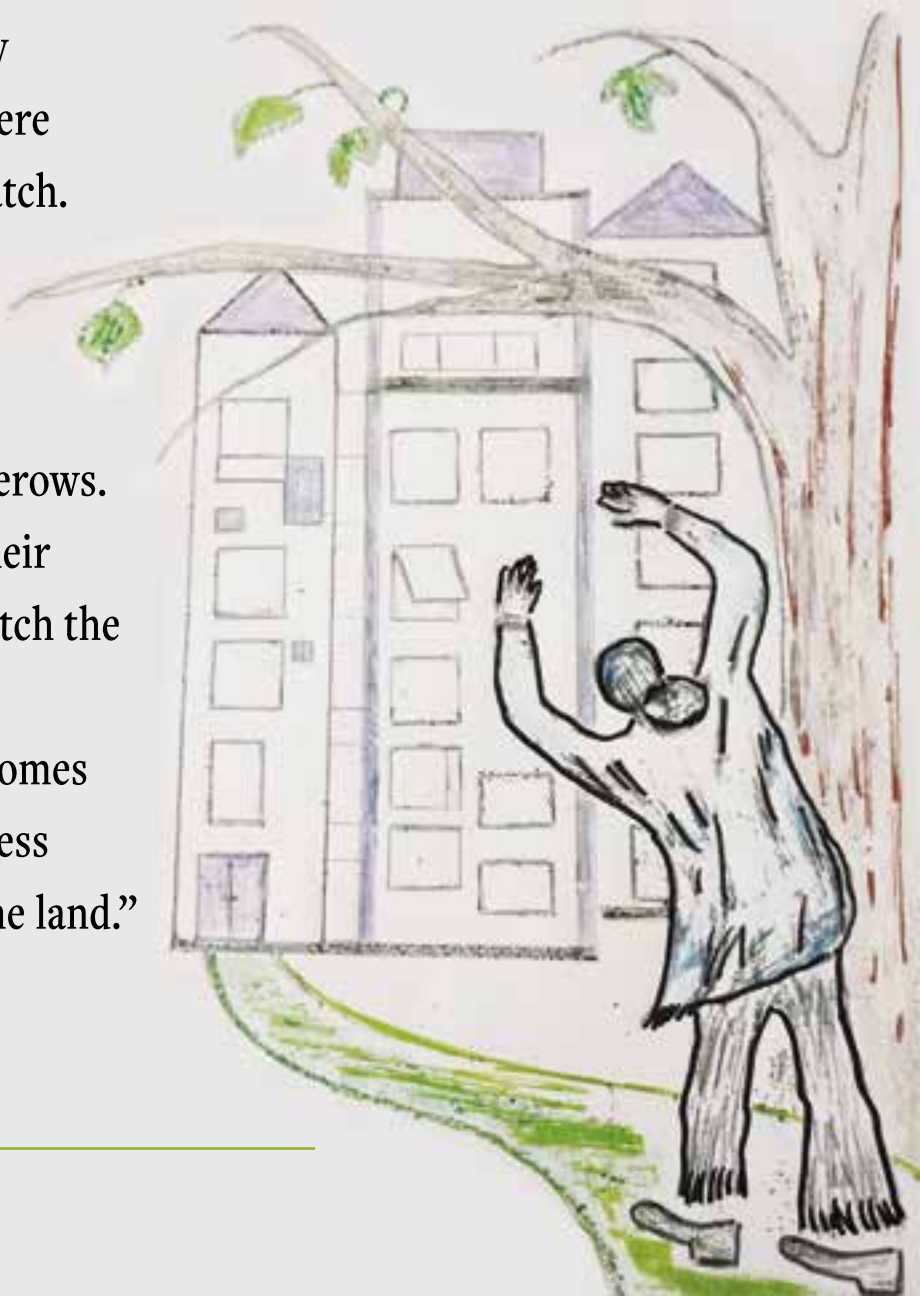
Interfaith Encounter

WINNER
SHAP AWARD 2011

The Vagrant Man

Only single buds will burst their
Skins and green the tree where the fields
Once were, with deep rooted thistles,
Buttercups and clover. Only
The scarecrow, that vagrant man with
A glint in his eye (that's neither
Friendly nor harsh) will loiter by
Flats being built in the fields where
He stood all day long keeping watch.

People forget the scent of late
Summer, as it fades in the fields,
And shades of green in the hedgerows.
But the single buds that burst their
Skins, that green the tree will catch the
Eye of the vagrant man who will
Look up and say, "People need homes
And I'm going there – I'm homeless
Now and I've done my time on the land."



Artwork & Poem by Janet Wilkes

faith INITIATIVE
EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Issue 50, publication date:
Autumn/Winter 2024/2025

editorial

I am inspired by the intriguing story behind the creation of the sculpture featured on our front cover and want to learn more of the indigenous peoples of North America, especially the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. The sculpture titled Kindred Spirits symbolises a remarkable story of empathy and generosity of spirit enacted by one nation for another. Drawing from their own experience of hardship created by a colonizing force, and known as the 'Trail of Tears', the Choctaw Nation were able to relate to the devastation caused by the potato famine to the Irish people; a famine aggravated by the actions of the British government of the time. In the 1840's the Choctaw community reached out across the Atlantic Ocean to provide funding to help feed those most vulnerable. Their gift at a time of great need has created an unbreakable bond of friendship and solidarity, reciprocated by the Irish people during the Covid pandemic when they reached out to help other indigenous peoples of America, the Hopi and the Navajo. *"Sharing cultures, make the world a smaller place"* remarks Choctaw Chief Gary Batton, a statement that feels particularly poignant right now when US President Donald Trump is withdrawing such empathetic connections. One has to ask however, how did the Choctaw Nation learn about the plight of the Irish people in the 1840's when news travelled very slowly, if at all? We can only imagine that it will have been by word of mouth, by stories told by seafarers, and it is even more amazing then that the Choctaw people responded in such a caring way. Today we receive news by the minute, so much so that we have almost become immune to shocking images that flash across our screens and do not respond. Only by genuinely listening to real life stories can we truly learn to empathise and engage as kindred spirits with those who are suffering. I am writing this on Holocaust Memorial Day having listened to many personal and tragic stories of survivors and their heartrending memories of how members of their families were killed in Auschwitz and other concentration camps, including those of Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg who's own moving narrative is told through an archive of family letters. Thankfully, our theme of interfaith encounters, and our feature on 'Young Voices' illustrates that the concept of kindred spirits is alive and well within some close knitted communities in the UK and beyond, as people of faith connect in the spirit of friendship and shared humanity with a desire to make the world a better place. This magazine is evidence itself of kindred spirits as all contributions, whether text, or artwork, are made and accepted only with the knowledge that the purpose of our endeavours is to help create a world where there is a shared understanding of what it is to be human. A personal experience prompts me to sign off this editorial by expressing admiration and gratitude to the NHS medical team at Lancashire Teaching Hospitals, a highly skilled team that emanated from all over the world and from whom I received remarkable treatment following an acute stroke on the 18th of October 2024. For myself and my family this demonstrates perfectly the value and the gift of immigration to the nation and the NHS in particular.

Heather Wells

www.choctawnation.com

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

faith INITIATIVE

www.faithinitiative.co.uk

Initiative Interfaith Trust

Registered Charity No. 1113345

Trustees: Heather Wells, Lorna Douglas and Charanjit Ajit Singh

Object:
The promotion of religious harmony by: Providing educational resources and information to promote a better awareness of the causes and consequences of inter-religious tensions and conflicts; and educating the public in the diverse nature of religious belief.

Faith Initiative: Embracing Diversity Magazine

Editorial Panel
Editor: Heather Wells
Co-Editor and Design Consultant: Lorna Douglas

Editorial Team
Charanjit Ajit Singh
Sr Maureen Goodman
Shiban Akbar OBE
Jehangir Sarosh OBE
Eda Molla Chousein

Poet in residence: Rebecca Irvine Bilkau

Aim: The aim of the magazine is to open windows on the beliefs and practices of people of different faiths and cultures: to foster understanding and reduce racially and religiously motivated violence.

Statement: Whilst the contents of this magazine will always be in accordance with the 'object' of Initiative Interfaith Trust, there will be freedom of expression.

Invitation: We invite you to contribute articles, poems, letters, artwork and responses so that the magazine reflects the religious communities it seeks to serve.

Editorial guidance can be obtained from:
Heather Wells, Slyne Hall, Slyne with Hest, Lancaster LA2 6BE
Email: hf_wells@yahoo.co.uk

Issue 51 Themes:
1. A Time to Celebrate
2. Assisted Dying

Front cover image: Choktaw-Memorial.jpg – "Kindred Spirits" sculpture, Midleton, County Cork, Ireland, created by Alex Penek. Photograph by Gavin Sheridan. The original top, bottom and left-hand edges of the photo have been digitally extended for this feature. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license. *https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en*

Front cover quote: Cited from *1,000 Prayers from Around the World* by Marcus Braybrooke, 2024

Back cover: The White Temple (Wat Rong Khun), Chiang Rai, Thailand. Photograph by Monica Smith

Design & Print: Reeds **T:** 01768 864 214

SPIRAL: "This is an ancient symbol that reminds us of the womb and the protective mothering nature in all of us. It takes us from the broad sweeps of the outer life to an infinitely small centre where we cease to exist."

Cited:
Mandalas: Spiritual Circles for Harmony & Fulfilment
Laura J.Watts (2002) Pub.Hermes House, London ISBN 184308 973 7

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

Cultural Safety

THE NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

"AT ITS CORE IS PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY VIEWED THROUGH THE LENS OF CULTURE WHERE INDIVIDUALS FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS FEEL INCLUDED WITHOUT FEAR OF DISCRIMINATION OR MISUNDERSTANDING"

I have been a GP and medical educator for over 30 years and during that time have been grappling with how we can address health inequalities and promote equity and fairness in medical training. It would be reasonable to say that we have hardly nudged the dial over this time, much to my dismay. Most ethnic minority groups report poorer health and worse experiences of using health services than their white counterparts. Rates of infant and maternal mortality, cardiovascular disease and diabetes are higher among black and South Asian groups than white groups and the Covid-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on most ethnic minority communities[1]. Within medical education there is as yet unexplained variation in the attainment of groups of individuals who share protected characteristics when compared with groups who do not share the same characteristic. Trainees from ethnic minority backgrounds, those who have qualified abroad and indeed those with disabilities and long-term conditions have a poorer experience and disproportionally worse outcomes from medical training when compared to their peers[2]. Numerous intricate factors interact to create the disparities we observe in both health and education. Untangling these issues is a challenging task, but I believe one effective solution lies in promoting cultural safety.

Cultural safety as a concept emerged from New Zealand over 30 years ago in response to discrimination faced by nursing students from a Māori background along with poorer health outcomes for indigenous populations. In her subsequent work, Irihāpeti Ramsden, a Māori nurse educator, described cultural safety as creating an environment where individuals feel respected, valued, and empowered, with no assault on their identity. She recognised that midwifery and nursing education needed to incorporate the concepts of cultural safety and all training institutions were expected to embed this within their curricula. Beyond this, healthcare services were also required to provide an environment that acknowledges and respects the cultural identity and lived experiences of patients[3].

Over the ensuing years cultural safety has gained prominence not only in healthcare but also in education, and community services especially in societies characterised by diverse cultural backgrounds. Cultural safety goes further than cultural competence which focuses on acquiring knowledge about different cultures, and describes an ability to interact with people from different cultures and responding to their needs. Cultural safety is all about fostering a working culture and practices that recognise, respect, value and harness difference for the benefit of the organisation and individuals[4]. At its core is psychological safety viewed through the lens of culture where individuals from diverse backgrounds feel included without fear of discrimination or misunderstanding.

Amy Edmondson defines psychological safety as *"a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, concerns, or mistakes, and the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking"*[5]. In 2012 Google started it's Aristotle project to discover what makes a "dream team" and identified four key factors that created a successful team; dependability, structure and clarity, meaning, and impact. However, none of these mattered without psychological safety creating an environment where team members felt comfortable expressing their thoughts and ideas openly, leading to more productive discussions and innovative solutions. At the heart of this was trust and levelling of power hierarchies.

"Begin with trust" say Frei and Morriss for whom trust has three main components; authenticity, logic, and empathy[6]. People are more likely to trust you when they believe they are interacting with the real you (authenticity), when they have faith in your judgment and competence (logic), and when they feel that you care about them (empathy). As is often said, trust is hard to earn yet so easy to lose, and when lost there has usually been a breakdown in one of these three elements. Building trust in teams and between providers and clients is essential for effective engagement. Psychological and cultural safety facilitates open communication and trust where individuals feel understood and respected. In turn they are more likely to share their concerns and cooperate with health and other professionals, leading to more accurate assessments of their needs and better outcomes.

Cultural safety is also about power dynamics and challenges prevailing narratives and practices that often overlook or marginalise minority cultural perspectives. Power and prejudice when acted upon can lead to discrimination and racism. Therefore, an essential feature of cultural safety is self-reflection and gaining an understanding of your own culture as well as your biases and the beliefs that you hold. Only then can you begin to see the perspective of another individual, attitudes you may have towards them and respect difference as well as valuing commonality. Melanie Tervalon uses the term cultural humility to describe such an interaction within healthcare[7].

"AT THE HEART OF THIS WAS TRUST AND LEVELLING OF POWER HIERARCHIES"

"AN ESSENTIAL FEATURE OF CULTURAL SAFETY IS SELF-REFLECTION AND GAINING AN UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR OWN CULTURE AS WELL AS YOUR BIASES AND THE BELIEFS THAT YOU HOLD"

This incorporates a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique, redressing power imbalances in the doctor-patient relationship, and developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic clinical and advocacy partnerships. This then translates to achieving health equity when individuals feel culturally safe, and are more likely to seek medical help, adhere to treatment plans, and engage in preventive measures.

Creating cultural safety within healthcare, education and community services needs commitment on behalf of not only institutions but also the individuals that work in them. This requires training to recognise and address biases and assumptions along with initiatives such as active bystander training. Reciprocal mentoring can help foster relationships and understanding with individuals from diverse backgrounds as can reflective practice. Additionally, institutions need to create recruitment and HR policies that explicitly promote cultural safety and ensure that all staff understand the importance of these principles. Within educational settings, cultural safety involves creating an inclusive curriculum that reflects the diverse backgrounds of students. Assessments need to be fair and address current awarding gaps and differential attainment. Educators need encouragement on how to create a supportive learning environment where all students feel valued and respected. Above all there needs to be involvement of minority and marginalised groups to ensure that diverse voices and viewpoints are heard.

"PERSONAL NARRATIVES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES ARE POWERFUL LEVERS WHEN TRYING TO CHALLENGE BIAS AND DISCRIMINATION"

Personal narratives and lived experiences are powerful levers when trying to challenge bias and discrimination. They provide a face and a story to often abstract issues to create an empathic connection making them more relatable and understandable to others. Moreover, sharing personal narratives invites dialogue and encourages others to tell their stories, creating safe spaces for discussion. Hearing individual voices from within communities can help to highlight the diversity of experience to demonstrate that discrimination may be nuanced depending on context, identity, and intersectionality. Above all storytelling facilitates an open exploration of biases, helping individuals to reflect on and indeed confront their own assumptions and prejudices, and facilitate dismantling of stereotypes. This in turn may motivate individuals in positions of power to advocate for policy changes or initiatives that address the roots of discrimination within their organisations and communities.

There will be challenges and institutions are often resistant to change as well as working within tight fiscal climates. Training and implementation strategies require resources, and any return on investment may not be immediately realised. Assessing cultural safety initiatives can be complex and institutions need to develop appropriate metrics to evaluate their effectiveness continuously. Feedback mechanisms, client satisfaction surveys, and community consultations can provide valuable insights into the impact of cultural safety practices. Furthermore, each cultural group has unique needs and histories, complicating the implementation of universal strategies for cultural safety. Tailoring approaches to specific cultural contexts requires ongoing dialogue with community members and a commitment to learning. Finally, organisations often have deep rooted attitudes and traditions which can be difficult to dislodge *"the system isn't broken, it was built this way"*. Courageous leadership is often required to help overcome such barriers.

A paradigm shift will be required if we are to level the playing field. We need to address the fact that providers may discriminate against people from marginalised groups and that some educators may have lower expectations from their students who are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The risk is that they pay less attention to them and provide them with fewer opportunities. This is not just about prejudice but also about the advantage we give to others. And privilege is not about the benefits you have had but the barriers you have not had to face. However, levelling up will need to go further and tackle issues of discrimination if we are to succeed. Prejudice may begin with individuals but soon pervades through organisations and systems. The fact is that diversity is a fact, not just to be tolerated but embraced. We need to create an ethos of psychological safety and beyond this cultural safety fostering an environment of inclusion and belonging where diverse perspectives are not only acknowledged but celebrated. Furthermore, cultural safety validates the experience and beliefs of individuals from marginalised groups and empowers them to advocate for their own needs and interests, promoting greater equity and understanding within society as a whole.

"A PARADIGM SHIFT WILL BE REQUIRED IF WE ARE TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD"

Prof Vijay Nayar, GP and Medical Educator

1 Kings Fund Tackling Health Inequalities | Seven Priorities For The NHS | The King's Fund, https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/tackling-health-inequalities-seven-priorities-nhs (accessed January 2025)

2 *"Levelling up Medical Education"* British Journal of General Practice Editorial (December 2022) (https://bjgp.org/content/72/725/560)

3 *"Cultural safety and nursing education in Aotearoa and te Waipounamu"* Ramsden I, Ramsden IM University of Wellington, 2002 (https://jme.bmj.com/lookup/google-scholar?link_type=googlescholar&gs_type=article&q_txt=.+Cultural+safety+and+nursing+education+in+Aotearoa+and+te+Waipounamu.+University+of+Wellington%2C+2002)

4 Williams, R. (1999), Cultural safety – what does it mean for our work practice? Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 23(2), 213-214.

5 Edmondson, Amy C. The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018.

6 Frei and Morriss https://hbr.org/2020/05/begin-with-trust (accessed January 2025)

7 M. Tervalon, J. Murray-Garcia (1998). Cultural humility versus cultural competence: a critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education, Journal of health care for the poor and underserved, Vol. 9, No. 2. (May 1998), pp. 117-125

The White Temple and Blue Temple

Google estimates that there are 40,000 temples in Thailand. Many are active temples where Buddhists leave daily offerings to the Buddha of incense, fruit, flowers and rice. Daily chanting fills the air in the mornings and evenings. The temples are very much at the heart of Thai community. Some temples are small and simple. Many are large and elaborate.

In Chiang Rai, eight hundred kilometres North of Bangkok, two temples stand out from all the others. Known simply as "The White Temple and The Blue Temple," they attract two million visitors a year.

They're different because they are modern temples that blend traditional Thai architecture with contemporary design. The colours have been chosen for their spiritual symbolism.

The sapphire walls of The Blue Temple (Wat Rong Suea Ten) symbolize wisdom and the infinite. The gold accents represent divinity and enlightenment. At the centre of the Blue Temple is a dazzling white Buddha, embracing visitors in a calm, reflective space.

The White Temple (Wat Rong Khun) opened in 1997. Chalermchai Kositpipat, the Thai Architect who created it, has gifted Thailand a national treasure. He chose white to symbolise purity and the divine. The temple's white façade, adorned with silver and mirrored mosaics, creates a dazzling effect in the Thai sunlight.

> "a dazzling white Buddha, embracing visitors in a calm, reflective space"

Writer and Photographer Monica Smith

HOPE

Visualize a forest that only has 5% of habitat left, well
That's in actuality situated at Indo Burma forest, Southern East Asia
Where deforestation is a big disaster
And they are cutting down trees faster and faster

We need to put a stop to cutting down trees
Don't even get me started about the topic of the seas
The great pacific garbage patch is getting worse and worse
It's like humans they have made their own curse

Mother nature is calling stop
And the world is getting too hot
The ice is melting really fast
The polar bears are at their last

So this is the end of my poem of hope
So just remember you and I, we are the future
So let's take action now
And create a new picture

Charlie was born in Ethiopia and currently lives in Sydney, Australia. He's 10 years old and has a keen interest in environmental issues; joining, at the age of 7, the 'Green Agents ', a preschool club that leads initiatives at the school such as recycling campaigns, introducing solar power energy, planting of shrubs in the grounds, educating the children on not bringing plastic wrappers in their lunchboxes etc. Charlie is often up on the stage in assembly talking about one of these new initiatives. This led him to write this poem about the environment and he was chosen to read it out, in the form of rap to the school in the assembly.

THE ENERGY OF YOUTH AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

Something extraordinary happens when young people are invited to make their voices heard especially on the important theme of climate justice and especially when the young people speak from a perspective of faith. The energy, engagement, expectation and excitement fill the room and participants are suddenly caught up in the intensity and passion of youth debate.

Such was the event – Faiths Together for Climate Justice & Peace 'Our Voices Matter' – Youth and Politicians Forum which took place on 20 September 2024 in the South Dining Hall at Queens University Belfast. 50 Sixth Form students, representing 12 post primary schools from Belfast, accepted an invitation to work together forming proposals and questions to pose to Northern Ireland politicians who were also in attendance.

The event was part of a 3-day programme led by 'Join the Dots Together network'[1]– a Northern Ireland group focused on building a community of individuals and organisations interested in and working for climate justice. The events programme was scheduled to celebrate both the Season of Creation[2] and International Day of Peace[3] and to involve a variety of groups including youth. The youth event was organised by 'Ephata Laudato SI'– a Down and Connor diocesan faith based environmental group.

Efforts were made from the outset to have a balanced representation from across the school sector with schools from the controlled sector and non-denominational voluntary grammar sector; from the Catholic sector and from the Integrated sector represented. Young people studying subjects with components of Politics, Religious Studies, Geography, Biology participated alongside students from school based environmental groups.

The session opened with Martin Palmer, Founding President of 'FaithInvest'[4] highlighting 'stories of hope' from a global perspective, emphasising the many positive actions already in progress – drawing from Daoist, Muslim and Christian traditions, among others. Students were amazed to learn that there are over 1.5 million religious environmental projects globally, that faith communities own or manage around 10% of the habitable surface of the planet and have immense financial power. This was followed by a 'buzz session' where the young people reflected on the stories and asked questions seeking clarification and further elaboration. The second session saw John Barry, Professor of Green Political Economy at QUB; co – chair of the Belfast Climate Commission and host of the event, in discussion with Martin - drawing parallels with examples from Northern Ireland and making links with the conditions necessary for positive behavioural change.

The event was designed so that the greater time was given to 'student voice'. During the course of the morning, students worked in groups alongside those from different schools devising proposals and questions and then exercising principles of democracy in voting for what they saw as the most pressing of the proposals and questions. Working together from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds/perspectives on a theme of common and shared interest proved very positive in breaking down barriers and encouraged inclusivity and collaboration – one of the added gains of the event.

Whilst a number of political parties were invited to send representatives – three responded positively and two attended – Lesley Veronica, Green Party[5] and Claire Hanna[6], MP, Social Democratic and Labour Party [SDLP]. Martin Palmer chaired the session with the politicians - ensuring that students' questions were answered and that proposals were given due consideration.

All the students ideas, proposals and questions were captured and ideas regarding next steps were also explored.

Lesley Veronica (Green Party), Claire Hanna (SDLP) and Martin Palmer

STUDENTS WERE AMAZED TO LEARN THAT THERE ARE OVER 1.5 MILLION RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS GLOBALLY, THAT FAITH COMMUNITIES OWN OR MANAGE AROUND 10% OF THE HABITABLE SURFACE OF THE PLANET AND HAVE IMMENSE FINANCIAL POWER

Quotations from speakers on the day which were commented on by students as some of their 'take-aways'

'I want to emphasise that the crises we face today are not only about ethics or science or overuse of fossil fuels. They're also about democracy and imagination'

'Your voices matter. Today we aim to 'flip the table' and engage you directly'

'Be bold, imaginative and kind'

'We need to challenge assumptions and ask bold questions'

'We are a narrative species - stories move us more than data'

'Faith communities hold immense potential to drive change at grass roots level'

'Local knowledge, creativity and collaboration are key'

'We don't protect the forests, the forests protect us'

The following represent a snapshot of the 'student voice' as captured on posters:

- Inspire people through narrative rather than data
- Targeting young people and bringing them together more frequently
- Get people involved in nature from a young age and give them the will to want to protect it.
- How does your political party plan to involve cross community action regarding environmental protection and education?
- Unified involvement – between political and religious – reducing the gap
- What can be done to include religious groups to join the environment conversation?
- Education – addition to curriculum on climate change
- Confront corporations with their responsibility
- Responsibility – lowering voting age
- Speak up to local politicians
- Young people spreading awareness

Questions posed to speakers by students

With regard to the relevance of objective truth in a world filled with different religious narratives – do you think using stories and narratives is the best approach? Isn't empirical truth the only common ground that everyone can agree on?

What do you think is the top priority for tackling climate change? Is it funding, education or something else?

What can be done to include religious groups that are opposed to climate action in the environmental conversation? How do we address their resistance?

Questions posed to politicians by students

1. Is it hypocritical of politicians to champion environmental action, yet the use of their private jets, funded by tax payers money contributes heavily to carbon emissions?
2. How can we involve young people in nature from an early age to inspire a lifelong commitment to protecting the environment?
3. If you could secure more funding , what kinds of programmes would you prioritise for the environment?
4. What do each of you plan to do to help stop the climate crisis? How will you fund it?
5. What's your opinion on the effectiveness of groups like Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil – do their tactics inspire change or do they alienate people?
6. How feasible is it to impose high taxes on the assets of the very wealthy? What are the barriers and do you think it could happen in the next decade?
7. Regarding international corporations. How do you plan to ensure that corporations stop using loopholes to evade taxes?

HOSTED BY PROFESSOR JOHN BARRY IN QUEENS UNIVERSITY BELFAST

NEXT STEPS

1 The students asked for another opportunity to meet together to further this discussion. **Update - Professor John Barry QUB is interested in exploring how best this might be achieved.**

2 The students asked that their views be made known to the political parties who were unable to attend the conference. **Update – Join the Dots Steering group is seeking face to face meetings with representatives of these parties. The first scheduled meeting took place on Friday 13 December.**

3 The students asked for more conferences on this theme – Join the Dots and Ephata are planning for another event for schools in May and/or September 2025.

Perhaps this quotation from one student best summarises the outcome of the event

'I was at the talk on the environment and religion with Martin Palmer and I was inspired!

The talk was amazingly interesting and informative. It opened my mind not only to the idea of the faiths being integral to the environmental mission, but also the idea that faith can be a strong uniting force not just a dividing one [which is a hard lesson to learn in Northern Ireland]. This has made me think how I can get involved with the environment as a career, which is something I have always wanted but never really knew where to look or start'.

MARTIN PALMER AND PROFESSOR JOHN BARRY QUB IN DISCUSSION AT OUR VOICES MATTER EVENT

STUDENTS POSE WITH CLAIRE HANNA MP AND LEADER OF SOCIAL AND DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY

Anne-Marie Duffy is the secretary of Ephata Laudato Si', member of Join the Dots Steering Group and Chair of Down and Connor Laudato Si' Group

1 Join the Dots Together network, founded in 2023 - Steering Group members: A Rocha, Belfast Jesuit Centre, Clonard Peace Ministry, Corrymeela, Down & Connor Laudato Sì Commission, Ephata Laudato Sì, Focolare, Inter-Faith Forum, Redemptorist Youth Ministry, Trocaire, Ulster University Chaplaincy, Youth Link NI

2 Season of Creation 1 September to 4 October 2024 set aside to focus on environment - a time set aside by Christian churches to consider the joy of creation and awareness-raising initiatives to protect the natural environment.

3 International Day of Peace 21 September 2024

4 FaithInvest – helps faith organisations to invest in line with their values for the benefit of people and the planet

5 Lesley Veronica is the Deputy Leader of the Green Party

6 Claire Hanna Member of Parliament for South Belfast and since October is Leader of the SDLP

When, exactly.

The measure of time I understand:
we need to know we share a notion
of half past three to meet there.

It is the measure of Now that tricks
around — wherever it is, it has gone.
Like the secretive sea splits and seals

its giddy foam around ocean liners
my present opens, closes, is
almost simultaneous with both

future and past. The only cosy element
is my own breath. I forget this, run
showreels in my memory, give them

power as if they were still, were ever
real; believe in horror stories waiting
to happen, as if I were a reliable prophet,

Only when, exhausted by fantasy,
I come home to the sacred grove
of this present breath (and this, this)

recall that permanence doesn't exist,
nothing blusters. Now is open armed,
pristine, ready to change the world.

Rebecca Bilkau

Photograph: Heather Wells

Amaravati Buddhist Monastery

A PLACE OF PRACTICE

Like the skilled diagnostician he was, he could point to the sources of our suffering and he could suggest remedies that can work

This will no doubt sound very shocking in a feature devoted to "Places of Worship" but, in Buddha-Dhamma, we don't worship! It's true that we pay respects to the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha and to our teachers (always by bowing three times) but we don't "worship". That's because Buddhism is a non-theistic religion without the concept of a Creator God at the centre.

The traditional cosmology of Buddhism (which can be regarded as an 'optional extra' by Buddhists in the West) includes celestial beings as well as other beings in lower realms than ours but there is no Creator God orchestrating how beings fare or holding them to account on a 'Judgement Day'.

At the heart of the teaching are the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path and the three characteristics of existence. The whole stated purpose of Buddhism is to bring personal suffering to an end.

The Buddha was a human being who lived in what is now Northern India and who attained to Enlightenment all of 2,600 years ago. From the time of the Enlightenment until his final passing away 45 years later he offered a unique teaching we call "the Dhamma", based on the understanding he had gained. He was not out to convert people to this new "faith" but he was ready to help anyone who was prepared to give ear to what he had to say.

Like the skilled diagnostician he was, he could point to the sources of our suffering and he could suggest remedies that can work, if only we are prepared to try them out.

In Buddhism there is no saviour as such because only the individual, him or herself, can make the choices and perform the deeds which allow suffering to come to an end. Our own choices and our actions ('kamma' or 'karma' in Sanskrit) generate the results which ensue. We can make wise choices or foolish ones but no one else can make those choices for us. In other words, the buck stops here.

What Buddhism offers is a route out of the maze, if we're willing to listen, pay heed and then put forth the right kind of effort. The ordained monks and nuns in training who do their best to follow the Buddha's example are referred to as "the Sangha".

In any case faith ("saddha" in Buddhism) is regarded somewhat differently to faith as it is understood in the traditional Abrahamic religions. It certainly holds a place but not the critical place given to it in either Christianity or Islam.

In Buddhism what matters is "practice", so what we do and how we approach life is more important than what we may happen to believe at any one time.

As with all other things, beliefs can change over time. What we believed as a child gives way to other beliefs later on. As a young person we can hold one set of beliefs and that is likely to change as we get older.

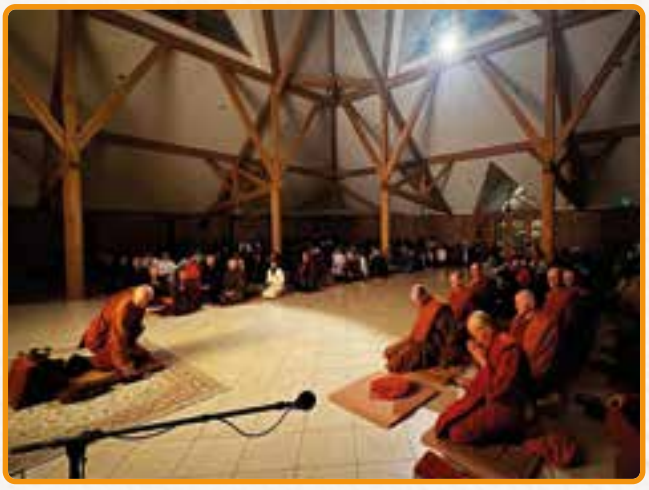
Therefore, Amaravati Buddhist Monastery promotes "practice" as being at the heart of its activities. In the first instance this consists of formal meditation, most often sitting meditation but it also includes meditating in the other three postures: walking, standing and lying down. There is an emphasis on the cultivation of mindfulness in all postures and during all waking activities, for example in doing work, in cooking and preparing food, in eating and drinking, in obeying calls of nature and in relating to one another in a spirit of tolerance and kindness.

As a result most newcomers find the monastery an unusually quiet and peaceful, yet purposeful place to visit. Visitors and guests can practise meditation in the Temple, spend time in the grounds, listen to talks about Dhamma when they are being offered, borrow books from the Library or take away new literature on display for free.

Whatever monks or nuns do, whether it is to offer any teaching, counselling or guidance to guests or visitors there is no charge. Dhamma (the teaching of the Buddha) is regarded as being something far too important to set a price on.

The Path

There is both an outward journey and an inward one. The outward one concerns where we go, whom we meet, how we interact and how our time is spent. The inward one is about a growth in understanding, a progressive letting go of the problems we create, a new freedom to speak and act in a way that is wholesome and beneficial both to ourselves and to others.



The Community

Ordained monks (bhikkhus) and nuns (siladhara) represent the heart of the community. Around them live novices, long-term lay residents and guests who can stay anything from just a few days up to a few months. Visitors for the day are also welcome and can be especially numerous at the weekend.

There is a profound sense of interdependence between the monastic community and the laity.

Monks and nuns have no income and are not allowed to touch, to store or to make use of money. In addition to that, under their rules, monks and nuns are not allowed to cook or to store food overnight. A bhikkhu has to have food or medicines offered into his hands by a non-bhikkhu, otherwise he cannot access them.

As alms-mendicants, the monks and nuns rely on lay supporters for the provision of food and all other essential requisites, such as cloth (to make into robes, as we sew our own) and everyday necessities such as toothpaste, soap and shaving cream all the way up to items of modern technology such as computers, PA or video systems.

Lay supporters

A monastery acts as a resource for lay supporters. In times of trouble the monastery is their first port of call and their final refuge. They can pretty much be certain of a sympathetic ear and some helpful guidance. In the end it is only they who can solve their own problems but advice based on the Dhamma can play a crucial part in that process.

Wisdom can be found in the unlikeliest places and at times not of our own choosing but a monastery such as Amaravati can offer a context within which the right kind of interaction can occur. A reflection offered in a spirit of kindness can save years of suffering.

In a world dominated by screens, large and small, many people long to be listened to and properly heard by another individual who is present and prepared to give them time and attention face to face.

What do guests do?

Guests stay free of charge but they are asked to do morning chores, offer help during work periods (often in the kitchen) and attend certain meetings (e.g. Pujas or services held morning and evening, which usually involve some chanting and a meditation sitting.)

There is also plenty of free time in which they can practise meditation in the Temple, study in the Library, interact with one another or go for a walk in the surrounding Hertfordshire countryside.

Many a good conversation occurs over breakfast or tea. There are scheduled opportunities to meet a monk or nun. Talks given in the past can be accessed from the "Dhamma vault", found on computers in the Library.

Occasionally there are bigger work projects than usual and guests who are motivated to give time and energy to supporting the community can spend more time on work, if they wish. Some guests find that providing immediate, practical support to a community such as this can be a powerful healing experience because they feel they are actually doing something useful (and it's not just for themselves.) Being part of something bigger than themselves can help to instil confidence and self-belief if someone is habitually either depressed or low in self-esteem.

So, it's not just about meditation, it's also about "community" and the sense of belonging to something they find worthwhile and worthy of support. The monastery environment is geared to the practice of generosity and service to each other, rather than to making money. For many this offers a refreshing change from the society outside and the expectations which it instils in people.

In a monastery there is tangible evidence of the goodness of other people and of their kindness. People are not seen as consumers or commodities. They are respected and valued for who they are. There is a spirit of co-operation and service.

The training

Monks and nuns in Theravada Buddhism are bound by a tight code of conduct called "Vinaya", which deliberately restricts their freedom in order to facilitate their training and their cultivation of the Path. It could be regarded as the "fast lane" of cultivation because, in one way or another, all followers of the Buddha are engaged in a process of training.

Most other people in the monastery live on eight precepts, which means taking a vow of celibacy, going without an evening meal, abstaining from intoxicants and drugs which cloud the mind and endeavouring to practise harmlessness to any living creature, however humble.

Compared to the outside world, the birds and the other creatures which inhabit our grounds are noticeably less alarmed by the presence of human beings. They understand that they are safe and so they have a sense of trust in the people around them.

The Amaravati Woods, across the road from the monastery, are designated a conservation area where wildlife can flourish with no fear either of being shot or of being harassed by dogs.

It's not just about meditation, it's also about "community"

The schedule

The schedule followed at Amaravati Monastery goes through different phases in the course of the year but a typical summertime pattern is as follows:

4am rising bell

5am meditation sitting

6am chanting

6.30 morning chores

7.15 breakfast

8.15 work meeting (then work period)

11.30 pre-meal gathering (a blessing chant is offered)

11.50 main meal of the day

12.30 washing up

1.30pm–5pm (usually free time)

5pm cup of tea

7.30pm evening chanting followed by a meditation sitting

During GMT the meal has to be eaten before 12 o'clock, so the schedule is slightly different in the winter months.

Every seven or eight days there is a lunar observance or "Moon" day set by the four quarters of the moon, when regular work is cancelled, as it is considered to be a day of practice. There is usually a Dhamma talk offered either afternoon or evening, in which a monk or a nun reflects on aspects of the Buddha's teaching and its application in daily life.

On such a day people get more of an opportunity to practise meditation and contemplation and the community sits in vigil till midnight.

The day following the Moon day is taken as a Quiet day.

Every Saturday afternoon a meditation workshop (or class) for the public is offered by a monk or a nun in the Temple between 2pm and 4pm. There is no charge and no need to book in advance but arrival before 2pm is advised.

Ajahn Dhammanando
May 2024

Sanctuaries of Peace, Reflection, and Community

As a child, I vividly remember my mum taking me to the Jain temple, which we call "Derasar." I recall the ritual of taking my shoes off before entering, the cool, soothing marble beneath my feet, and how, in an instant, I was transported to a world of calm and peace far removed from the bustling outside. The soft fragrance of incense lingered in the air, and I can still picture my mum using the back of a matchstick to place a small dot of sandalwood paste on my forehead after we prayed. These visits, more than anything, made me understand what it meant to be a Jain and how central the temple was to our community.

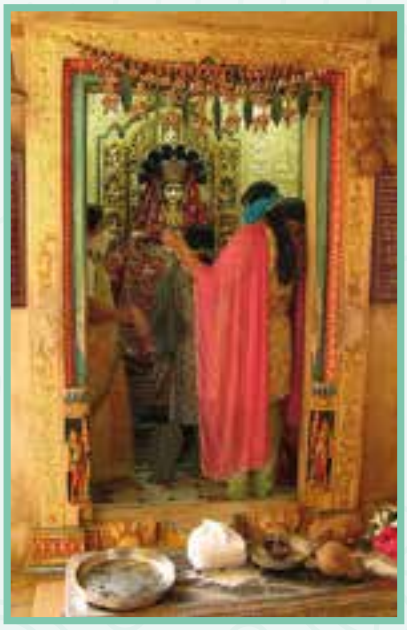
Introduction

Jainism, one of the world's oldest religions, traces its origins to ancient India. It teaches a life of spiritual discipline, ethical living, and self-reflection. At its heart are five core principles that guide followers on the path towards spiritual liberation:

1. **Ahimsa (Nonviolence):** Respect for all living beings, avoiding harm in thought, word, or action.
2. **Satya (Truthfulness):** Honesty and integrity in every aspect of life.
3. **Asteya (Non-stealing):** Taking nothing that is not freely given, honouring others' belongings.
4. **Brahmacharya (Chastity):** Purity in relationships and self-restraint.
5. **Aparigraha (Non-possessiveness):** Releasing attachment to material things, fostering simplicity.

Jain temples embody these principles. Beyond being spaces for worship, they are sanctuaries for meditation and self-reflection, and their adjoining spaces are often used for community activities. The temples represent the harmonious intersection of spirituality, artistry, and community.

Delwara Temple



Temple Worship

Jain Temple Architecture: A Spiritual and Artistic Marvel

Jain temples, also known as **Derasars**, are architectural masterpieces that reflect precision, craftsmanship, and profound symbolism. Their design follows the principles of **Vastu Shastra**, an ancient Indian architectural science that seeks harmony between human spaces and cosmic energy. Every detail, from the intricate carvings to the upward-ascending spires, serves a deeper spiritual purpose.

The architecture of Jain temples is symbolic of the spiritual journey towards liberation ("moksha"):

- **Shikharas (Spires):** The tall, tapering spires represent the aspirant's journey upwards, striving to transcend worldly attachments and attain spiritual liberation. The towering form reminds worshippers of the soul's ultimate goal.
- **Sanctum Sanctorum (Garbhagriha):** The inner sanctum houses idols of the **Tirthankaras**, enlightened beings who have achieved liberation. This sacred space symbolises the purity and stillness of the soul.
- **Lotus Motifs:** Carvings of lotus flowers adorn the temples, symbolising purity, spiritual upliftment, and the unfolding of enlightenment.
- **Celestial Figures:** Many temples feature intricate depictions of celestial beings and divine guardians, serving as a reminder of the soul's celestial potential.
- **Mandapas (Halls):** Spacious prayer halls symbolise openness, inviting devotees to engage in communal reflection and worship.

Externally, Jain temples are often built from white marble or light-coloured stone, symbolising purity and spiritual elevation. The gleaming, polished surfaces lend the temples an ethereal quality, emphasising inner clarity and peace.

Iconic Examples of Jain Temple Architecture

Jain temples across India and the world showcase a remarkable variety of architectural styles, each with its unique story and significance:

1. **The Dilwara Temples (Mount Abu, Rajasthan):** Considered masterpieces of marble craftsmanship, the Dilwara Temples date back to the 11th-13th centuries. These temples are renowned for their intricate carvings that depict scenes from Jain mythology, floral patterns, and detailed sculptures of the Tirthankaras. The simplicity of the temple's exterior contrasts with its awe-inspiring interiors, where every inch is adorned with extraordinary detail.
2. **The Palitana Temples (Shatrunjaya Hill, Gujarat):** Perched atop Shatrunjaya Hill, the Palitana complex consists of over 850 temples, built over several centuries. This sacred site is considered one of the holiest Jain pilgrimages, as devotees climb the 3,800 steps to reach the summit—a symbolic act of spiritual ascent and penance. The temples' gleaming white domes create a breathtaking sight against the backdrop of the sky.
3. **Ranakpur Jain Temple (Rajasthan):** Renowned for its geometric precision, the Ranakpur temple boasts 1,444 marble pillars, each uniquely carved. The play of natural light and shadow through the intricate latticework and towering ceilings creates an atmosphere of divine tranquillity.
4. **Shravanabelagola (Karnataka):** Home to the colossal statue of Lord Gomateshwara (Bahubali), this site is a pilgrimage destination where devotees gather to reflect on the virtues of renunciation and self-discipline. The monolithic statue, standing at 57 feet, is a striking symbol of spiritual detachment.

Ranakpur Temple

Community Gathering in Oshwal Hall

I recall the ritual of taking my shoes off before entering, the cool, soothing marble beneath my feet, and how, in an instant, I was transported to a world of calm and peace far removed from the bustling outside

Spaces for Spiritual Reflection

A Jain temple is not just a place of worship; it is an invitation to pause, reflect, contemplate and reconnect with oneself. From the moment devotees enter, they are enveloped in an atmosphere of serenity—the cool natural stone floors, the soft glow of lamps, and the lingering fragrance of incense create a sense of peace.

Central to Jain temple worship is the presence of the **Tirthankaras** in the sanctum. These revered statues, depicted in meditative postures, are more than idols—they serve as visual guides for devotees, inspiring them to follow the Jain path of nonviolence, truth, and self-realisation.

Rituals in Jain temples are intentionally meditative and contemplative:

- **Lighting incense and offering rice:** These acts symbolise purity, humility, and gratitude, and act as a reminder of the effects of karmic bondage in one's life.
- **Chanting sacred sutras:** Recitation of Jain hymns focuses the mind, fostering mindfulness and inner calm.
- **Meditation:** Devotees engage in silent reflection, seeking to cultivate compassion, self-awareness, self-discipline and detachment.

Unlike some religious practices that seek divine favour, Jain temple rituals emphasise personal transformation and ethical living.

Jain Temples as Catalysts for Community Life

Jain temples are vibrant hubs of community life, with its adjoining facilities typically of community halls and grounds, serving as centres for cultural, educational, and charitable activities:

- **Educational Initiatives:** Temples host classes on Jain philosophy, ethics, and meditation, nurturing both spiritual and intellectual growth. These teachings emphasise Jainism's timeless principles of nonviolence, truth, and simplicity.
- **Charitable Activities:** Guided by **ahimsa** (nonviolence) and **aparigraha** (non-possessiveness), Jain communities lead initiatives such as food drives, blood donation camps, and environmental conservation programmes. These efforts reflect the Jain commitment to serving all living beings.
- **Cultural Celebrations:** Festivals like **Paryushana** and **Mahavir Jayanti** bring the community together in celebration, reflection, and renewal. Temples serve as gathering points for weddings, life-cycle ceremonies, and communal meals, fostering a sense of unity and belonging.

The temple's role as a community hub ensures that its influence extends beyond worship, nurturing values of compassion, forgiveness, generosity, and ethical living.

Oshwal Jain Temple

The Jain Temple at Oshwal Centre, UK

The Oshwal Centre in Potters Bar, Hertfordshire, stands as a beacon of Jain faith and cultural heritage in the UK. Built piece by piece with pink sandstone and white marble stones imported from India, the temple is a stunning representation of traditional Jain architecture. Intricate carvings of the Tirthankaras, celestial beings, and symbolic motifs reflect the artistic mastery and spiritual depth synonymous with Jain temples.

Beyond its architectural splendour, the Oshwal Centre fosters a strong sense of community. During festivals like **Paryushana**, the temple comes alive with prayers, rituals, and communal gatherings. The adjoining community hall hosts weddings, educational talks, charity events, and spiritual discourses, making the temple a vital centre for cultural and social connection.

Conclusion

Jain temples are far more than sacred spaces for worship. They are sanctuaries of peace, arenas for self-reflection, and vibrant hubs of community life. Through their awe-inspiring architecture, meditative rituals, and community-driven activities, these temples embody Jainism's core principles: **ahimsa** (nonviolence), **satya** (truthfulness), **asteya** (non-stealing), **brahmacharya** (chastity), and **aparigraha** (non-possessiveness).

For those unfamiliar with Jainism, visiting a Jain temple offers a glimpse into an ancient yet profoundly relevant way of life—one that champions mindfulness, compassion, and ethical living. Jain temples stand as timeless reminders of the power of peace and simplicity in a complex world—principles that continue to inspire and guide millions across generations.

> An ancient Indian architectural science that seeks harmony between human spaces and cosmic energy

Ajay Punatar is a Trustee of the Institute of Jainology UK.

Institute of Jainology UK leads the UK Jain communities in representing the Jain faith in government, interfaith collaboration and with major institutions, to bring awareness of the Jain religion.

To Take the Risk of Friendship

A LIFETIME OF ISLAMIC-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Before entering into the subject of this presentation, let me present myself. I am a Catholic Christian, born into a Catholic family of Irish origin. I was ordained a priest as a member of the Society of Missionaries of Africa, an institute which was founded in Algeria in 1868 and whose first work was among Muslims. I did my pre-ordination studies in Tunisia where the weekly programme included two hours per week of standard Arabic. After becoming a priest in 1961, I was sent to Rome for further studies in theology but, to my surprise, I was asked then to join the staff of the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, an Institute founded by our Society in Tunis, but which had moved to Rome in 1964. My knowledge of Arabic being way insufficient, I took a degree in Arabic at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), part of London University.

After a year of teaching in Rome I obtained a post in the Department of Religious Studies at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, where I spent two happy years. John Mbiti, the Head of the Department, explained to me that my task would be to second Said Hamdun, a Kenyan Muslim, in the teaching of Islam. I went to Said to see which courses he wanted me to give. I expected him to say that he would reserve the particularly religious topics, such as the Qur'an or Islamic practices to himself and that I could take the history of Islam. Instead, he gave me the freedom to choose whatever I wanted. Such confidence was truly encouraging. Nevertheless, it was with some apprehension that I started teaching. I knew that there were Muslims in the class. How could I, a Catholic priest, be teaching them their own religion? I got over this difficulty by saying to the students: "I am not here to teach you, but to help you to study. You don't have to accept what I say, but if you disagree and wish to contest it you need to have good arguments. It is not enough to say: in our family we have always understood it this way." On this basis we proceeded on good terms. Most of the Muslim students I had were Ismailis, followers of the Aga Khan. They knew little about mainstream Islam, Sunni Islam, which is what I had studied, so they found that they could learn something from me, while I, at the same time, learnt much from them. At the end of my time in Makerere I asked the Muslim students whether they were satisfied with the teaching they had received. Most said yes; one girl, a Shi'ite, but not an Ismaili, said that she would have preferred to have had a Muslim lecturer, which, I thought, was very honest on her part.

"I am not here to teach you, but to help you to study"

"Well then, let us pray together"

Once my two-year contract with Makerere was over, I was called back to the staff of the Institute in Rome, then, in 1972, I was appointed Director of the Institute, a position I held until 1978. Before taking up this new position I had the chance of visiting Lebanon. The World Council of Churches (WCC) had organized perhaps the first international Christian-Muslim conference in Broumana. The person in charge of the Islam desk at the Vatican department, the Secretariat for Non-Christians, a French Missionary of Africa, Joseph Cuoq with experience in Algeria, had been invited to attend. Knowing that a WCC meeting would probably be run mainly in English, he asked me to replace him. It was true that most of the proceedings were conducted either in Arabic or in English. At one stage I was not really satisfied by this meeting, feeling that it tackled too many questions, without treating any of them in depth, and also that it was full of official speeches following the "party line" rather than listening to what people really had to say, yet I have to admit that the meeting had a snowball effect, in that there were a number of follow-up meetings in different countries, so more people became involved in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

The Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome had the excellent tradition of inviting visiting professors who would be offered hospitality at the Institute itself. One year the Algerian Minister for Religious Affairs, a former university professor, was invited and he came with his wife. While the lecturer was preparing his lectures and the public lecture he was to give, it fell to me to show his wife around Rome. One day we were visiting a church, and I invited her to come to the centre to admire the mosaic in the apse. We had to pass in front of people who were praying quietly. Afterwards this lady said to me: "Would you pass in front of people who are praying?" I realised that in Islam one would never go between people and the *mihrab*, the niche indicating the direction of prayer. In dialogue one can learn from each person.

In 1975 the Institute (now known as the *Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi ed Islamistica PISAI)* produced the first volume of its journal *Islamochristiana* as a "scientific instrument" for Christian-Muslim dialogue, offering space for contributions from its permanent staff, invited lecturers, and others, both Christians and Muslims. Every year since, a volume has been published. 1(1975) was a slim volume of 182 pages, whereas 49(2023) contains 65 pages in Arabic and 507 pages in various European languages, including an important section "Notes and Documents" very useful for a contemporary history of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

There is a tradition that the Director of the PISAI be appointed a Consultor (meaning Advisor) of the Secretariat for Non-Christians (now Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue) and I was appointed to this role in 1973. This included invitations to attend various meetings with delegations of Muslims from Iran, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. The last-mentioned delegation, headed by the Saudi Minister of Justice, came to speak about human rights. There was a memorable audience with Paul VI. The Saudi spokesperson gave an address in Arabic, followed by a French translation. The pope responded with a prepared text in French. No Arabic translation had been foreseen, so Fr (later Archbishop) Abu Mukh, a Syrian heading the Islam desk at the Secretariat, stood at the right of the pope. At the end of each paragraph, he took the paper from the pope, translated unhesitatingly into excellent Arabic, and handed the paper back to the pope. One could not help noticing the disapproval of the *monsignori* accompanying the pope, but Paul VI himself was completely unperturbed. The speeches were followed by an exchange of gifts. Paul VI asked what one of the gifts presented to him was, and the answer came "a prayer mat". The pope immediately said: "Well then, let us pray together", and there was a deep moment of silence. The peace and contentment this brought to the gathering is reflected in the official photos of the audience that were taken immediately afterwards.

In 1978, at the end of my mandate as Director of PISAI I was appointed to Sudan, to a community established in Halfa Jadîda, (New Halfa). Our community worked in the Catholic parish. There was tension between us and our parishioners. These were mainly from the South of Sudan which was not yet independent at this time. These Southern Sudanese were for the most part young men who had not had any schooling – since the schools had been closed on account of the civil war. They had come to the North looking for work. Because these Southern Sudanese belonged to different ethnic groups, speaking different languages, we conducted our ministry through Arabic. They were exploited, given all the worst jobs, such as cleaning the fields of sugar cane after they had been set on fire at the time of harvesting the cane and cleaning the irrigation canals with the danger of contracting bilharzia. They were also despised, because there is racism among the Arabs and the Arabized Sudanese towards Black Africans.

As Missionaries of Africa, we felt we were called to serve not only the Christians but the whole population. The parish had an evening-school run in conjunction with the local office for adult education, and the staff were local Muslim teachers. Most of the pupils were Muslims too, in fact the Christians were reluctant to enrol in the school despite our encouragement. One member of the community organized classes in typing which were open to young girls, whether Christian or Muslim. All these activities took place within the compound of the church. Our Christians resented this: they felt that we should be 100% at their service and not concerned with Muslims.

> *He was only wishing for me that which he held most precious for himself*

There was a similar reaction from the Muslim side. I remember one of the teachers in the school, who became a good friend, saying: *"Why do you waste your time with those black students?"* This only served to convince us that our option was right. Though personally I was not much engaged in the educational activities, I did feel the tension caused by these different expectations.

For my part, I made contact with a local sheikh and frequented his *halqa* (study circle). When the time came for me to leave Sudan, I informed the sheikh, and he prayed for me that I might see the light and become a Muslim. I did not feel annoyed. He was only wishing for me that which he held most precious for himself. He had never made any attempt to convert me. To my mind, the spirit of dialogue is vitiated if it aims at conversion, understood as a change of religion. It can only aim at conversion as "the humble and penitent return of the heart to God in the desire to submit one's life more generously to him." (cf. *Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue,* Dialogue and Mission no.37)[1].

I returned to Rome, but not to PISAI. For the next six years I was involved in the central administration of our missionary Society. Then in 1987 I was appointed as Secretary of the Vatican office for relations with the followers of other religions.[2] This was an enlargement of scale, from Islam to all the different religions, except Judaism, for relations with Jews are the competence of the Commission for Religious relations with Jews which comes under the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity. However, I did more in the field of relations with Muslims, because this had been my training and experience.

The PCID engaged in formal dialogue with groups of Muslims: the Al al-Bayt Foundation set up by Prince Hassan bin Talal, of Jordan; the World Islamic Call Society, based in Tripoli, Libya; with Shi'ite Muslims in Iran. Generally, these dialogue meetings took place on an annual basis, one year in Rome, the next year in a venue at the choice of the Muslims. Once we had chosen the topic to be discussed – it was usually not theological, but something of general interest, for example: religious education at higher levels; the rights of children; migration; religion and the media, women in society We would usually proceed in three steps: what do our religions say about this particular topic? What is the actual situation? What can we do together to improve the situation? In the preparatory meeting with the Ahl al-Bayt Foundation for the dialogue on Women in Society, we informed our Muslim partners that we would ask a woman to present the paper on what Christianity teaches. Our partners said that this would be impossible for them; the paper would have to be given by an imam. They would ask women to present the two other papers. When the meeting took place, the women in the Muslim delegation were horrified at the imam's presentation and submitted him to a violent verbal attack. He got all the Muslim men present to defend him, and the women achieved nothing. If they had been a little more patient, and had engaged in gentle questioning, it may have led to further discussion. Much patience is required for good dialogue.

We found that this multiplicity of dialogue meetings risked going beyond the strength of the PCID. To remedy this, we got leading Muslims to agree to establish an International Christian-Muslim Liaison Committee. This did not work out as we had hoped. We would have wished the Muslims to bring together representatives of institutions around the world, particularly from the large Muslim populations of Asia, but the Muslim side was taken over by a Muslim of Syrian origin, living in Saudi Arabia, who invited only Arabs, or Muslims in Europe.

Representatives of al-Azhar were present at the meeting in Rome, in June 1995, where this new body was created, but al-Azhar was not included in the membership of the committee. The reason for this exclusion was that al-Azhar was considered not to be an international organization, but a national (Egyptian) institution, though with an international outreach. This did not please al-Azhar, and after several years of negotiations, led with obstinacy by Dr Ali Elsamaan, a special agreement was signed between the PCID and al-Azhar in 1998[3]. It should be mentioned that during the intervening years a special office for dialogue with monotheistic religions had been set up in al-Azhar. Annual meetings followed, alternatively in Cairo and in Rome. In 2000, as part of his Great Jubilee programme, Pope John Paul II visited Egypt, in the steps of Moses, and was warmly welcomed at al-Azhar[4]. The subsequent Al-Azhar – PCID meetings were, at the request of the Muslim side, programmed each year on or about 24 February, to keep alive the memory of Pope John Paul II's visit.

> *Bilateral meetings facilitate a sharper focus, but multilateral meetings are often more conducive to understanding and cooperation.*

> *"When we move beyond doctrine and morality to friendship, then the "other" becomes our "brother" and "sister"."*

In addition to these regular meetings, the PCID organized regional meetings of Christians and Muslims: for North Africa, and for English-speaking West Africa; for South-Est Asia, and South Asia. We asked the bishops of the countries involved to hold national Christian-Muslim meetings from which they would choose the representatives for the international meeting. As a result, the participants in the international meetings tended to represent their countries rather than their religions; an interesting dynamic.

There were also occasional multi-religious meetings to which Muslims were invited: a meeting on marriage and the family at which Ajit and Charanjit Singh represented Sikhs; a meeting on our various Scriptures as resources for peace at which 8 traditions were represented; another meeting to prepare the present millennium (according to the Christian calendar); this concluded with a statement prepared by the participants and read out during a final ceremony in St Peter's Square presided over by Pope John Paul II. Bilateral meetings facilitate a sharper focus, but multilateral meetings are often more conducive to understanding and cooperation.

In October 2002 I succeeded Cardinal Arinze as the President of the PCID, but in March 2006 Pope Benedict XVI appointed me as Nuncio in Egypt and Delegate to the Arab League in Cairo.

Strangely, though Egypt is the most populous Arabo-Muslim country in the world, I was not often engaged in Christian-Muslim dialogue during my time there.

Recent Popes, including Pope Francis, have all followed faithfully the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in its Declaration *Nostra Aetate* on Relations of the Church to Non-Christian religions, but Pope Francis has emphasized friendship as a basis for dialogue, as witnessed by the Declaration on Human Fraternity (DHF) which, in 2019, he co-signed with Dr Ahmed al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar[5]. In recent years I have been advocating the DHF as a programme for dialogue and cooperation between Christians and Muslims[6].

Let me conclude with some reflections from a different area of the world:

When we focus on the doctrinal teachings of Islam and Christianity, we will find both commonalities and differences. Similarly, when we focus on the moral teachings of Islam and Christianity, we will find commonalities and differences. While the commonalities give us something to work on together, the differences inevitably lead to "othering". However, when we move beyond doctrine and morality to friendship, then the "other" becomes our "brother" and "sister". In friendship there is unity, harmony, belonging and community. We are equals. companions on the journey, encouraging and supporting one another, pilgrims sharing the same journey towards the fulness of Truth and Goodness…

I encourage Christians, Muslims, and believers of all faiths, to take the risk of friendship. It does not mean that we compromise our doctrines or our morality. We hold and practise them with integrity, but in their proper place, under, not above, the greatest laws of love of God and love of neighbour (cf. Mark 12:28ff, Matthew 22:36ff).

Especially in the context of the ongoing war in the Middle East, it is even more important that Jews, Christians and Muslims reach out to one another in friendship. Dare we? I fear for our world if we dare not.[7]

---

1 This document can be found in Francesco GIOIA (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue. The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963-2005)*, Boston, Pauline Books & Media 2006, pp.1156-1189.

2 This office had been set up by Pope Paul VI in 1964 as the Secretariat for Non Christians. In 1988, under Pope John Paul II, it was renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), and in 2022, under Pope Francis, it became the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue.

3 Cf. the report in *Islamochristiana* 24(1998) pp.218-220 with the text of the Agreement. On the important role of Dr Ali Elsamaan se LEFEBVRE-ELSAMMAN Brigitte, *A Life dedicated to Dialogue: Aly Elsamman: From the Coptic Church in Tanta to the Presidency of the International Union for Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue and Education for Peace (ADIC)*, Nomad Publishing, London 2022 x + 114pp.

4 Cf. *Islamochristiana* 26(2000) pp. 179-186 including a translation of an article in the leading Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* by Ali ELSAMAAN ("The Pope in Egypt – Meeting of the Symbols").

5 The English text of DHF can be found at *www.vatican.va/content/Francesco.en/event.dir.html/content/vaticsn events/en/20192/4fratellanza-umana.html*

6 See my article "Fraternity. A Proposal and a Project for Relations between Christians and Muslims", *Islamochristiana* 47(2021) pp.133-142; and also *Islamochristiana* 45 (2019) and 46 (1920) volumes dedicated to the study of the DHF.

7 Rev.Dr. Patrick McInerney, Director of Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, BLACKTOWN, NSW 2148. AUSTRALIA, Editorial in *Bridges* No.105 (December 2024).

LANGUAGE OF ART

Zen and the Art of Making

I've been a student of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh for the past ten years and my Buddhist practice has had a slow and persuasive influence on my creative practice over that time. I've spent most of my 50 plus creative years writing – fiction, poetry, essays, immersive walks – always interested in what form can do. This curiosity has latterly unfolded into also making artistbooks from my writing, exploring three-dimensional form in relation to the subject. I create solo and in collaboration, and also facilitate, coach and mentor other creative practitioners.

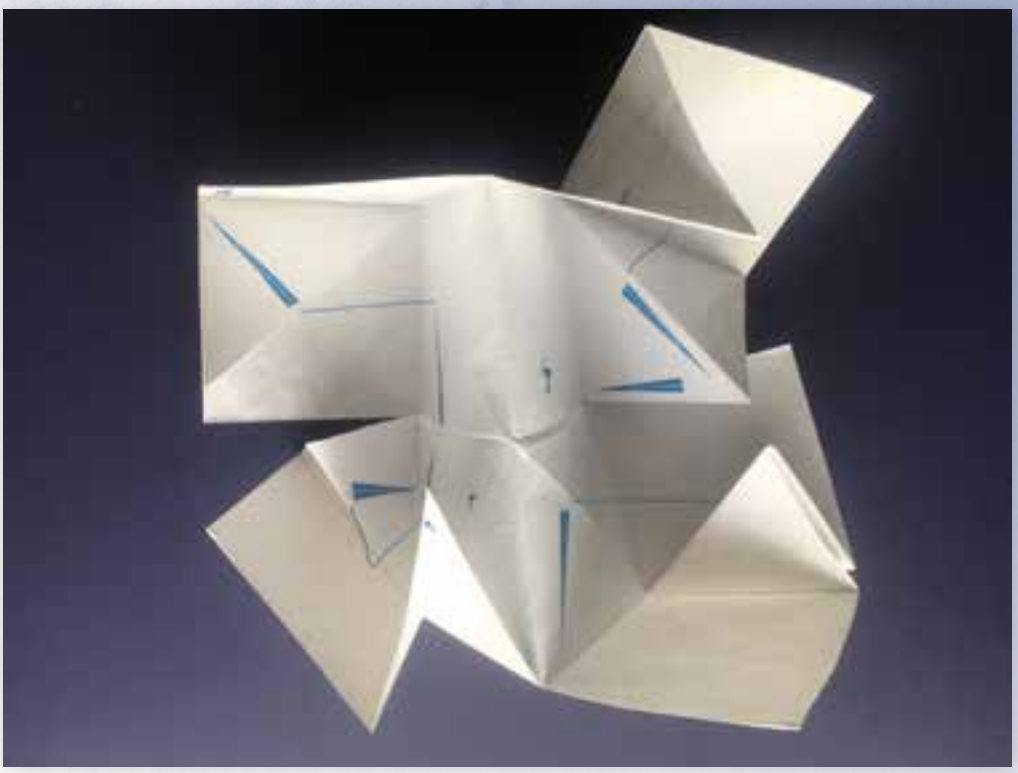
My faith in the ongoing creative force of our world dovetails with my spiritual faith. Creatively, I'm as restless as the oak, reaching for light and nourishment to express myself in gloriously unpredictable ways. I'm as responsive to my environment as our planetary ecosystem is, as rhythmic as the seasons as they loosen themselves from their historical markers of our movement through the year.

My spiritual practice has given me a greater understanding of these rhythms, and what I might do to accommodate them within a meaningful practice. I have a collection of Thích Nhất Hạnh's calligraphy on postcards under my computer screen which I rotate as needed when immersed in a project. The following unpacks some of how these postcard gathas relate to my creative practices.

> "My faith in the ongoing creative force of our world dovetails with my spiritual faith"

Be beautiful be yourself

I cannot choose what I write or make. I begin with subjects that interest me, but these initial ideas grow from the combination of imagination, time and environment, ultimately developing a life of their own. They become their own energetic beings that are truly alive when I can almost see the original seed in them while also sensing so much more that surprises, perhaps even bewilders, me. They may not be the ardent, feisty, political beast I had hoped for at the outset. But neither am I. I might want to pack a greater punch, in my physical and writing life, but that is not who I am. What I write, who I am, has its own beauty. Me and my creations are the ragged robins in this world, bog-lovers, small and tender, few and far between.



Are you sure

Every new piece requires accepting I know very little about it. I'm constantly taking first steps in the new world of a poem, artistbook, or audio walk narrative. I'm never totally sure of which way forward. These worlds are in flux, changing with every word or mark I make. The physical world writ large. Which is why I'm drawn to the poetic. It allows the material to be metaphor, and bringing white space into a page holds uncertainty, a breathing space for me and any future reader to consider the mash of connections being illuminated. There isn't necessarily a destination, only signposts. This is inevitably challenged with commissions or marketing what I offer. We live in a world that expects outcomes, product and consumer benefit. Creativity is by default a generous act, offered with willingness and joy. It doesn't map neatly onto our mainstream economic structures. I'm never sure about pricing what I do or make. And have to trust – have faith – in the world upholding me. It has done so far.

> "Flow doesn't follow singular lines.
> It evaporates, condenses, ebbs and upwells"

We are already what we want to become

I hold faith in the ideas that come to me. If I can sustain an idea long enough for it to form a shape, for me to know what it might look like – even if only approximately – then I trust I can make it so. Or as close as possible to how it is imagined. I just need patience: the lesson both my creative and spiritual practices are still teaching me. Besides, there is no rush. I may as well enjoy whatever it is I'm making, since I'll only start at another beginning after it.

Let go

Yes, I have ambition for my work. When my mother died, I wrote through my bereavement. This grew into an entangled memoir of the many forms of grief my matrilineal ancestors had experienced over centuries. Its variegated nature is taking time to find a home, is not an obvious best-seller. I'm used to occupying the peatlands of the industry, am still reminding myself to relinquish my younger self's desire for prizes and fame. I write to find out how we inter-are, and that includes celebrating those who win prizes instead of me!

Be still and know

There's no rush. I'm not a contracted writer who needs to turn out a commercial novel every 18 months. I can be still and let the words or images come, or not come. I know I'm writing when I'm not actually writing. My sitting and walking meditation practices are my creative practice. Anything that allows me to attend to my action feeds my imagination, allows me to realise that I'm not alone. The rest of the world is in fact swirling inside me, and by being still, even if in motion, I can draw on all those influences to help me and maybe the work unfold.

sarahhymas.net

No mud no lotus

No one said it was going to be easy. And I do find the work very hard, the editing to make sense to others, the polishing so it gleams, the cutting so no rough edges catch the movement of a book. Every so often an idea and its execution rise so completely it seems as though I happened to be the conduit for its roaming in our global consciousness. But being that conduit has been oiled by the graft I've put into previous pieces of work. No matter how long it takes to form, every work is a lotus, growing from the mud of indecisions, not knowings, confusions and doubt. Even the ones that don't bloom will sink back into the mud to compost.

Go as a river

The collective wisdom that shapes my solo creative work is perhaps most tangible in my collaborations and the Imaginariums. The Imaginariums are temporary (online or inperson) communities that hold space for writing, zine and artistbook making, and latterly for creativity more widely. Like my collaborative work, they honour what each person brings to the collective. I might have called the people together, but within our meets everyone's view is valued and as essential as anyone else's. Together we deepen our individual creative flow, strengthen our convictions of the collective creative energy and carry it in our own trajectories. The beck or bog we inhabit will feed into a river downstream, which in turn connects with more rivers, lakes and the ocean.

The flow of action and influence, of cause and consequence, that all these illuminate, can't be as easily tracked in the doing as I've listed here. Flow doesn't follow singular lines. It evaporates, condenses, ebbs and upwells. Attending to it gives me a faith that what I do is part of the larger arc of all creative and spiritual endeavours. In fact, to separate their words with 'and' is to be disingenuous. They aren't separate, they are pathways to connection – with myself, my focus, understanding, imagination, and with future readers and listeners of the work who bring it to new life through their experiences. Just as you might have done with these words here.

Space for

Basant Panchami is a festival celebrated across South Asia, initially starting in India as a Hindu festival in springtime to honour the Goddess Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, music, and learning. In Pakistan it's largely celebrated in Lahore, where huge crowds of men, women, and young people of all ages participate by dressing in the colour yellow, eating sweet dishes, wearing flower garlands, and displaying flowers in their homes. Kite flying is also a major activity, and very much integrated into Pakistan culture and my own love for kites goes back to my childhood. I remember flying a kite in my local park every Sunday afternoon while my brothers played football, and it is very much part of the Basant celebration. The kites are inscribed with people's wishes, prayers, and messages. This year, Wentworth Woodhouse, South Yorkshire hosted the Basant cultural community festival. It's an all-day event that brings families from different backgrounds together to take part in actives including kite flying. As a community we took three coaches of BAME families including refugee women and toddlers, older Pakistani members, and a BAME disability group. For many, it was the first time they had left their homes since the Rotherham riots which created fear in the community.

Holding the Basant Festival in this northern town presented an opportunity for those whose heritage lies elsewhere to celebrate their culture, art, music, and food. What better place than Wentworth Woodhouse, a bold, ambitious visionary heritage site that paves the way for others to follow in its footsteps. I wanted to bring back nostalgia and memories from my own culture and share it with the wider public so that they can better appreciate and understand the rich cultural heritage that minority communities bring to this country. Edward Said writes about 'estrangement from the homeland' the exile who "exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half involvement and half detachment, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another." (Said, 2000, p. 49) I feel the idea to bring this wonderful South Asian cultural celebration to a post-industrial northern town, is in my DNA. Through art and culture, I can celebrate my identity, heritage, and who I am today and so can many others.

"The kites are inscribed with people's wishes, prayers, and messages."

Selfhood

Rotherham's first Basant Festival was held in late August 2024 as part of the annual Wentworth We Wonder art and cultural festival: calligraphy workshops, mandala art, flower seed bombs, Kashmir egg painting, and kite-making. Bombay Baja Brass Band started the event, Northern Kite Group and their beautiful kite display, Sangeet Choir, and Hameed Brother's Qawwali performance. South Indian food such as dosa (rice and lentil thin crispy pancakes served with spicy sambar and chutney). The long queue of people wanting to taste their first dosa and merge in the whole South Asian experience spoke volumes.

Nothing can be achieved however without willing partners, resources, and a space to hold cultural events. Sometimes we can work well together and create amazing events. In times of difficulty, we need to step up, lead the way, and bring our different communities together, build bridges, foster positive relationships, challenge the hate rhetoric, and have faith in what we do. The arts are a medium to celebrate diversity and the richness that immigrant and migrant communities bring to this country. As the daughter of an immigrant whose father came to this country as a Commonwealth Citizen in the 1960s to work in the steel industry, I feel I have an important role in celebrating my Pakistani heritage and culture in the place where I live and finding my "in-between" space for "selfhood," when we find "ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion". (Bhabha, 2012, p. 2). It is in these complex spaces of creativity we learn to value our differences and humanity and heal the rifts. In these spaces of creativity, we walk with our ancestors.

References

Bhabha, H.K. (2012). *The Location of Culture*. Abingdon, Oxon/ New York: Routledge.
Said, E. (2000). *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Photo info

1. "Welcome to Basant Mela" panel in different languages produced by One Voice with Pakistan, Lahore Artist, Asma Khan, bringing with her the lived experience and knowledge of the Basant Festival having experienced it many times in her city of Lahore.
2. The expertise and knowledge came from the Basant community panel representing South Asia, India, Pakistan, and Nepal. Lots of community members and groups worked very hard, bringing their skills to making kites, banners, and flowers to be displayed at the festival.
3. Creature Encounter's animatronic Summer Lion
4. Sangeet Choir in yellow. In spring the fields are filled with yellow mustard crops. The yellow colour symbolizes light, energy, optimism, and prosperity and is worn during the Basant mela.

Photographers

Asma Khan, Yasmin Wahid, Amy Mangham, Abigail Hackett, Yasmeen Ali, Izbeth Khan

WE Wonder & Basant Kite Festival 2024 - Wentworth Woodhouse

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Ey9Gg7Yjuw
Fused Frame Photography

Acknowledgment

The festival was co-curated by the Rotherham Basant Festival Community Panel of individuals and groups (Apna Haq, Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance, BAME young people and carers group, Sangeet Choir and Gopa, Raha, Sharada Rao, Shahnaz Din, Showkat Ali, Asma Khan, Yasmeen Ali, and Laxmi Khadika). Partners Wentworth Woodhouse, Flux, ROAR, (Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance) Rotherham United Community Trust, Age Concern, Kathy Wilkison of Steel City Community Consultation Ltd, One Voice, Big Sisterz, Casting Innovation Ltd, Sheffield Hallam University, Mowbray Gardens Library, and many others.

Flying Home

If only the strong gust of this northern steel town
blows me swiftly towards the gentle breeze of home.
If only I could fly to the one place my heart
always yearns for, despite the years gone by.
If only for a day I can be that carefree child again,
flying my kite in the sunny green valleys of Kashmir.
If only I could hear the laughter of my friends
as our kites get tangled like our lives have today.
If only the angry northern wind carried me to
the loving arms of a mother I never forsaken.
If only the wind would become my wings and take me towards heaven.
In my dreams, I fly to lots of places, meet lots of different people,
and celebrate lots of different cultures.
In my dreams, I am flying to the home I left behind many decades ago.
But I never quite get there.
I wake up before I reach home with tears
streaming down my face and a deep ache in my heart.
I am torn to shreds, lying lifeless on the ground,
suffocated by the cruel wind that will not let me fly.
My body is imprisoned in this place that I cannot leave.
But my spirit is free, and every night, like all the other kites flying
across the world, I am finding my way home.
Eventually, one day, my kite will come home.

My work is influenced by Pakistan's national poet and political theorist, **Allama Muhammed Iqbal**, Here he writes about the Eagles (Shaheen). "The Eagle's advice to its youngster". These four lines of a long poem stayed with me, metaphorically to my mind representing a kite, the unity of being one, the vast sky above us for kite flying, and the majestic way kites sway in the air like falcons or eagles in full flight. Those memories inspired my poem; *"Flying Home"*

You know that all eagles are in essence one.
For God has given us the vastness of the skies.
Your flight has the majesty of angels
In your veins is the blood of the falcon.

DONATION/SUBSCRIPTION

PLEASE TICK RELEVANT BOX. PRICES ARE FOR UK AND IRELAND (INC. P&P)

1 year subscription **£8.00** ☐

2 year subscription **£12.00** ☐

I would like to make a donation to support the magazine **£** ☐

All work undertaken to produce the magazine is voluntary

giftaid your donation

Total £ ☐

Thank you

I wish my donation to be treated as a gift aid donation.

I am a UK taxpayer
please tick and date box ☐

Editorial Note from Heather Wells
We have a large archive of previous issues of the magazine available to buy at a reduced rate:
Issues 1 – 49 available on request @ £3 each issue inc. p&p
Orders of 6 and over @ £2.50 each issue inc. p&p

Please make cheques payable to
Initiative Interfaith Trust and send to:
The Editor, Faith Initiative: Embracing Diversity, Slyne Hall, Slyne with Hest, Lancaster LA2 6BE.

Please see our website www.faithinitiative.co.uk for Credit and Debit Card options plus payment through PayPal.

For any query involving donation/subscription please contact: Heather Wells at the above address or email: hf_wells@yahoo.co.uk • Telephone: 01524 822183

www.faithinitiative.co.uk

My details are:

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

Post Code: _____ Tel No: _____

Email: _____

This form can be photocopied or downloaded from the website

For overseas subscriptions please see website. € and $ currencies payable through Paypal

faith INITIATIVE

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

Please contact the Editor for further information on themes covered in previous issues – see details over the page.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM OVERLEAF

www.faithinitiative.co.uk

Each Step Has a Hint of Hope

**Step, step, step. Each step an in-breath.
Each step an out-breath.**

**Each step in memory of a child killed in war.
Each step is heartbreaking.**

I look at the feet of those walking with me. I imagine them as the feet of a child. Sometimes they are.

I imagine this child with all its hopes and dreams, joy and anger, love and life.

**Each step in memory of a child killed in war.
Each step is heartbreaking.**

I see feet rushing on the sidewalks. Cyclists darting past. Cars honking with frustration as they wait for us. I see myself in all of them.

**Each step carries the energy of those around me.
Each step feels impossible.**

Then I look up and down the street. I see an endless line of feet walking slowly, intentionally, silently, peacefully. Starting and ending at the statue of Gandhi and the memory of his satyagra. Starting and ending at the statue of Nelson Mandela and his "long walk to freedom". Starting and ending at the statue of Millicent Fawcett and her suffrage pilgrimage.

**Each step carries the energy of those that came before us.
Each step has a hint of hope.**

I see feet belonging to Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Jains. I see feet belonging to other faiths and none. I see feet belonging to different skin colours. Different ages. Different weights as they each make their way onto the ground.

Each step carries the energy of those with me. Each step has a hint of hope.

I see feet approach me, asking what this is for. I explain it is a walk for peace, though I don't really know what that means. But I feel it. I see them slow down as they approach us. I see them ask to join next time. I see them smile.

**Each step carries the energy of those that will come after us.
Each step has a hint of hope.**

23rd June 2024
Vedantha Kumar is a *Wake Up London* Practitioner

Restorative Interfaith

Creating Brave Spaces for Difficult Dialogues

The disastrous deterioration of the situation in the Middle East that we've been witnessing has had a huge impact on communities here in the UK (and elsewhere) and a palpable, chilling effect on interfaith relations. Interfaith groups and organisations have found ourselves picking our way through tricky, unchartered territory and facing difficult choices, a crucial one being whether or not to attempt to provide spaces in which the impacts of events in the Middle East can be addressed directly in open dialogue—particularly between Jews and Muslims—or whether the whole issue is best left well alone. I want to suggest here that, as difficult it is, interfaith organisations are uniquely placed to facilitate such dialogues and that, if we don't try, we risk irrelevance at precisely the moment we could have most to offer.

While Interfaith Glasgow (the charity of which I'm CEO) has hosted many dialogues on topics which highlight commonality and generate fellow-feeling, over the last few years we've also been making increasing efforts to address some of the thornier, more challenging issues affecting interfaith relations. These issues often sit as elephants in the room in interfaith dialogue, as we carefully step around them, for fear of exposing vast chasms of difference that we've neither the time, resources, nor expertise to bridge. We have done this because we began to feel increasingly strongly that, if we want to do more than merely affirm similarities or exchange pleasantries, we cannot ignore the elephants forever. *Safe* spaces—in which we never encounter challenge or discomfort—are not enough; we must also create *brave* spaces where thorny issues can be tackled: where we can ask difficult questions of each other and be willing to listen to the answers, so that we come to really understand where others are coming from, and learn to live well with principled differences of opinion about issues that affect us deeply.

With this aspiration in mind, over two and a half years, we worked in partnership with the West of Scotland Branch of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) on an invite-only Jewish-Christian dialogue series exploring the line between antisemitism and legitimate criticism of the State of Israel: an issue that has only become more pressing and more controversial since. This is an area where tensions can run deep. Online and elsewhere in the public sphere we see increasing polarisation and mutual hostility in the conversation about such issues, and very little space made for complexity or nuance. We wanted to model a different kind of conversation—one where the primary aim was increased understanding; and we wanted to test different facilitation methods that might help participants really hear one another and encourage them to seek deeper and deeper clarity about why others hold the views they do, without being in any way compelled to agree. What became clear to us is that, when it comes to highly emotive, controversial topics, it's not enough to simply sit people around a table with a few starter questions and hope for the best. Creative facilitation and the use of diverse facilitation tools are necessary to foster active listening, so that participants don't merely wait for their turn to speak.

Our participants were sufficiently encouraged by their growth in mutual understanding, that they wanted to share their learning more widely to encourage others to engage in similar dialogues. So, following the dialogues they worked together online to collate their learnings into a single document, which they edited collectively over several weeks. This document now forms part of a resource we launched last year entitled *Creating Brave Spaces: Learnings from a Jewish-Christian Dialogue on Antisemitism*. The resource, which has been very well received, can be downloaded for free from Interfaith Glasgow's website. It uses this particular dialogue series as a case study but has the broader aim of helping equip and empower other groups wanting to tackle difficult, controversial issues constructively. It contains descriptions of the various facilitation tools we used, as well as honest reflections from both participants and facilitators about which facilitation methods aided trust-building and open discussion, and what pitfalls to avoid.

Safe spaces—in which we never encounter challenge or discomfort—are not enough; we must also create brave spaces where thorny issues can be tackled

> Interfaith organisations have the huge advantage of being neutral brokers, whose primary agenda is improving communication and building relationships between communities.

Building on this work, over the last year, in recognition of the great strain placed on interfaith relations by the devastating events in the Middle East and the alarming rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism, we worked in partnership with Interfaith Scotland to deliver another carefully facilitated dialogue series entitled: 'Courageous Conversations: Nurturing Community Relations in Light of the Middle East'. These dialogues took place in the neutral space provided by the Interfaith Scotland Dialogue Centre and brought together Muslims, Jews, and Christians—board members and close supporters of both organisations—and aimed to create a space where they could share honestly with each other the ways in which events in the Middle East are deeply impacting their communities and explore ways of nurturing community relations in light of those impacts.

The sessions—five in all—were emotionally demanding, often uncomfortable and painful for many involved, as participants discussed: their lived experiences of the devastating events in the Middle East and their impact on their communities; and explored, for example, key areas of contention, such as marches and rallies, and differences between impact and intention with respect to the use of certain words and phrases in connection with the region. Although five sessions was nowhere near enough, participants told us that that the series had provided the only context they knew of in which they were able to have understanding-seeking interfaith conversations about these issues. And although they continued to disagree, they gained an increased understanding of *why* people think and react in certain way. At the final session, they reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening community relations through these most difficult of times, and emphasised the need for *more* facilitated dialogues where people could express themselves with integrity and listen to each other respectfully, remembering our common humanity.

Facilitating this kind of dialogue is not easy and reticence is well-placed, for without adequate time, resources, patience, skills, and commitment, the risk of making things worse is real, particularly during a period of ongoing open hostility. It is worth emphasising, especially, the point about time. Trust is built incrementally, and the issues themselves are layered and complex. Without sufficient time to deal with the worms one may unearth, the dialogue indeed risks worsening relations—both between participants and between one's organisation and the wider community. Difficult dialogues need to proceed at their own pace, making it hard to predict in advance the number of sessions that will be required or what the end point might be—a fact which is hugely inconvenient at the coalface of outcome-orientated, short-term funding cycles. And the challenge is made still greater by the mundane reality that it is extremely difficult to get the same group of people together regularly over an extended period of time, given busy lives.

But the situation in the Middle East isn't going to mend itself any time soon and, in the current context, the detrimental effects of *not* providing spaces for this dialogue are also becoming very clear: because when the elephants in the room take up so much space that having to come together without acknowledging them feels, at worst, impossible and, at best, superficial, people simply stay away. Engagement ceases. And mutual misunderstanding and suspicion grow.

In the end, what is the alternative to interfaith organisations offering brave spaces for constructive dialogue on the issues over which there are deep divisions? If these are issues our communities care deeply about, don't organisations whose core purpose is to facilitate constructive dialogue have a responsibility to offer an alternative to the debate and mud-slinging that too often characterise their discussion online and elsewhere? Interfaith organisations have the huge advantage of being neutral brokers, whose primary agenda is improving communication and building relationships between communities. We can offer spaces where it's clear that no single faith or perspective is privileged; where everyone's voice is equal; where agendas are set through outreach, participation, and consensus; and where space is always made for disagreement.

> What has become increasingly clear over the last year or so, is that building solidarity between communities is not always a cosy tea-and-samosas affair, but sometimes requires the gritty, painful work of striving to understand perspectives we may find deeply challenging.

What has become increasingly clear over the last year or so, is that building solidarity between communities is not always a cosy tea-and-samosas affair, but sometimes requires the gritty, painful work of striving to understand perspectives we may find deeply challenging, of making space for another's pain alongside our own, and of figuring out how to keep communicating and recognising our common humanity, despite huge polarising forces. Interfaith organisations are uniquely placed to facilitate this work, but we must start creatively upskilling ourselves for the task and we need the resources to do it. In particular, interfaith organisations desperately require adequate funding to ensure that dialogues can take their course and that we have sufficient capacity to explore new ways of working in an unprecedentedly challenging landscape.

For Interfaith Glasgow, a recent injection of funding from the National Lottery Community Fund has been particularly timely in this regard, because it has enabled us to explore new facilitation approaches with huge potential in relation to current challenges. The Interfaith Restorative Justice (IRJ) project is an innovative new three-year partnership project on which Interfaith Glasgow has been working with The Faith & Belief Forum (the UK's largest interfaith charity), and London-based Restorative Justice charity Why Me?, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. The project is working in Glasgow and Solihull to train interfaith teams of volunteer facilitators and to engage with diverse communities to identify incidents of faith-based hate or conflict that would benefit from a restorative process. The aim is to bring Restorative Justice principles and practice together with interfaith dialogue to develop new approaches that give agency to people who have been harmed, supporting them to develop an understanding of what happened and why, and to articulate their needs and help direct what happens next. This process can bring healing and closure and, at its best, can transform attitudes and change behavior, defusing tensions at their root.

While the project's core focus is on responding restoratively to religiously aggravated hate incidents, it is becoming apparent to us that restorative approaches have much to offer when it comes to facilitating difficult interfaith dialogues more generally, partly because they offer participants a different way of being in the dialogue space. Restorative circles, for example, encourage participants to speak honestly about their experiences and to listen attentively to the experience of others, thereby foregrounding emotional responses and not just opinions, enabling participants to more easily encounter each other as fellow human beings.

The emphasis in restorative practice on preparing participants for dialogue and following up after a dialogue, moreover, offers possible ways forward in situations where tensions are so great that people do not feel able to come together. In interfaith dialogue we have a tendency to throw participants in cold, but when tensions are running high, perhaps we need to pay more attention to preparing participants for dialogue. In restorative practice, by contrast, there are usually several pre-meetings with both parties before any meeting between those parties takes place. In these meetings, participants are forewarned of what the other party is likely to say, enabling participants to begin reflecting on—and working through—their reaction before any actual meeting takes place. Even if participants still don't feel able to come together, this kind of mediation may nonetheless foster greater mutual understanding between groups in periods of increased tension.

Despite a general pessimism about the likely ongoing impact of the situation in the Middle East, I am increasingly optimistic about what consciously exploring new approaches might bring to the facilitation toolkit of interfaith organisations when it comes to tackling the deepening polarisation we are witnessing. I hope funding bodies will also see the potential of exploration and innovation in this area and will resource interfaith organisations to undertake it.

Rose Drew, December 2024

To download the *Creating Brave Spaces* resource please go to *https://interfaithglasgow.org/publications/*

Interfaith Solidarity

A Jew and Muslim raise funds for a Christian Eye Hospital working in Gaza... wearing blindfolds.

On 5th September, Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra and Dr Ed Kessler walked blindfolded through central London, to raise money for the St John of Jerusalem Eye Hospital, which offers services in many locations in the Middle East, but the hospital in Gaza sustained heavy damage in the war. They both wore blindfolds to symbolise the sight saving work of the hospital. Basic eye care services have been resumed and the medics treat over 800 people every week, while continuing full services in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Ed Kessler, founder of the Woolf Institute in Cambridge, and Ibrahim Mogra, interfaith leader and imam from Leicester, are good friends. They were led by a Christian guiding them, from the East London Mosque to the Bevis Marks Synagogue before finishing, somewhat relieved at St John's Church in Clerkenwell. They raised £7,500 for the charity which provides expert eye care to people regardless of ethnicity, religion, or ability to pay. You can still donate!

Rev Dr Paul Hackwood, SJEHG trustee and Anglican priest, described the hospital as having "a long and proud history of providing advanced eye care to people in the region regardless of their religion. The ongoing conflict has made that work all the more urgent. The hospital in Gaza has sustained heavy collateral damage and the rest of its operations across the region have been put under immense strain."

Ibrahim and Ed were pleased to hear that the hospital worked closely with the Israeli Health Ministry, Israeli and Christian hospitals as well as the Palestinian Ministry of Health. They decided to work together because of the horrific pictures coming out of Gaza and the terrible suffering. They wanted to model Muslim-Jewish solidarity in a simple and practical act to emphasise and support the hospital's humanitarian work.

The walk began at the East London Mosque with a welcome from a Mosque representative explaining its history, spanning more than a century and serving communities in the heart of the East End and beyond.

"They wanted to model Muslim-Jewish solidarity in a simple and practical act to emphasise and support the hospital's humanitarian work."

In 1910 notable Muslims established the London Mosque Fund to create a mosque in London and since then, it has become a well-known feature in London's East End. Ed regularly brought Woolf Institute students to the mosque to meet local leaders and learn about interfaith relations in East London.

One reason why the East London Mosque is important is that the Fieldgate Great Synagogue used to be located next door and Jewish and Muslim services and prayers ran side by side. Over time the Jewish community in the East End declined until, in 2009, services ceased. The Federation of Synagogues sold the building to the East London Mosque in 2015 and the Hebrew plaque indicating the synagogue remains in place today. A sign of respect by Muslims towards Jews.

Ed and Ibrahim set off, rather carefully, to the beautiful Bevis Marks Synagogue, which opened in 1701. However, before they arrived each was interviewed on the walk by a BBC Radio journalist who was reporting on the walk for the Sunday Programme on Radio 4. In the report, he highlighted that the walk was an opportunity to build links in the Muslim and Jewish Communities in the UK and reinforced a multi-faith engagement model as well as addressed humanitarian needs.

The synagogue itself is a Grade I listed building and is the only synagogue in Europe that has held regular services continuously for over 300 years. They were met by rabbi Shalom Morris who took them inside (blindfolds were taken off by then!) and shown them around. He explained the synagogue design and decoration, which had been influenced by the synagogue in Amsterdam, from where the first Jews who returned to England under Cromwell in 1656, originated.

Before long it was time to put the blindfolds back on and prepare for the final journey to St John's Church, ancestral home of the eye hospital.

Both Ibrahim and Ed are conscious that the events in the Middle East have polarised Jewish and Muslim (and Christian) communities and their response is this simple act of human solidarity. Two individuals, one Jew and one Muslim, walking from a Mosque to a Synagogue in support of a charity with a Christian heritage.

They hope the message of Jewish-Muslim solidarity offers all faith communities under pressure a model for partnership, collaboration and dialogue.

"the walk was an opportunity to build links in the Muslim and Jewish Communities in the UK and reinforced a multi-faith engagement model"

Being Peace

Engaged Buddhism and the Legacy of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh in the UK by members of his community (The UK Community of Interbeing/Plum Village UK)

Colin Hodgetts is an Anglican priest and was a Director of Christian Action, involved in helping US draft dodgers. With Satish Kumar, he founded the London School of Nonviolence that demonstrated against US involvement in Vietnam.

Colin met Thích Nhất Hạnh (known by his students as Thay) in the late 60s when Thay gave a speech in Marylebone as chair of the Vietnamese Buddhist Peace Delegation. Several Vietnamese nuns and monks had immolated themselves in an effort to bring worldwide attention to the indescribable suffering experienced by the Vietnamese people. Meeting Thay was a profound experience for Colin, who recounts some of these below.

'The quiet and considered way in which Thay (Thích Nhất Hạnh) spoke about the war and how he justified such an extreme response struck me deeply. When an opportunity arose to attend a week-long retreat with him in Cumbria I cleared my diary.

Spending time with Thay and seeing how he moved and spoke brought his teachings to life in a completely new way. Thay said that he noticed that great human beings bring with them something like a hallowed atmosphere, and when we seek them out we feel at peace, we feel love, we feel courage.

In the late 70s while running *Save the Children's* reception centres for Vietnamese refugees, it became clear that the effectiveness of our nurses and social workers was limited by the understanding of their interpreters. Having experienced Thay's presence and the power of his practice, we believed that bringing a spiritual dimension into the work would help them to relieve the great suffering endured by the refugees.

With Thay's approval, Julia took a party of social workers to Plum Village monastery, which he established in the South of France. He was very generous with his time; cooking for them, leading meditation and giving instruction assisted by Sister Phuong (Chan Khong).

Later, I was able to spend a week at Plum Village myself. It was a beautiful and re-energizing experience. A walking meditation with Thay in Plum Village introduced participants to a novel way of relating to the earth and the natural environment. Every step is gently placed with no hurry, with respect for the ground and all that grows in it. We stop in front of a tree. Normally we might be contemplating it in an aesthetic way: its shape, its colour, the dance of the leaves. But here we are engaged in a different relationship that begins with interdependence: we breathe out carbon dioxide, the tree takes it in and releases oxygen which we breathe in. Our understanding increases and our respect grows. The real beauty is in our relationship with the tree.

Thay was always responsive and attentive to the needs of Westerners encountering Buddhism for the first time and his unique contribution to Buddhism in the West was to introduce 'engaged' practice.

> "Every step is gently placed with no hurry, with respect for the ground and all that grows in it."

> "Engaged Buddhism is the kind of wisdom that responds to anything that happens in the here and now - global warming, climate change, the destruction of the ecosystem, the lack of communication, war, conflict, suicide, divorce. As a mindfulness practitioner, we have to be aware of what is going on in our body, our feelings, our emotions, and our environment."
>
> *Thích Nhất Hạnh - History of engaged Buddhism.*

Thay was knowledgeable about Christianity and showed great respect for Jesus and his teachings, which he envisaged as being given on the move as Jesus travelled from place to place with his disciples, as the Buddha did. Thay has often described the experience of being deeply aware of the present moment as being in the 'Kingdom of God.

Thay wrote:

"We should not be attached to any view: we have to transcend all views. Right View, first of all, means the absence of all views. Attachment to views is the source of suffering. To be scientific, scientists have to release what they have found in order to come to a higher truth. This is the teaching of Buddha. When you consider something to be the truth and you are attached to it, you must release it in order to go higher."

Society as a whole would benefit from a neutral ground where spiritual issues can be openly discussed, and differing views could be explored. I believe all denominations and faiths would benefit from meeting with others to explore ways in which each individual and faith group can respond in a spiritual way to the concerns that Thay has outlined.

In June 2024, with Quakers for Britain, Plum Village UK organised a silent, interfaith walking meditation for peace in central London, with 13 faith groups represented.

"When you consider something to be the truth and you are attached to it, you must release it in order to go higher."

Peace Walk June 2024

"I come from a Jain and Hindu background and what I love about Thay's teaching is that I don't feel I need to reject either tradition."

Avni - a young parent and student of Thay says, *"One of the things I love about Thay's teaching is that it's so open. I come from a Jain and Hindu background and what I love about Thay's teaching is that I don't feel I need to reject either tradition. Recently, I have been reconnecting to my roots, which I do think is because of Thays' teachings."*

Today, there are over 100 local groups in the UK meeting regularly as part of a diverse and still-growing community practising Thay's teachings. There are now many thousands of Thay's students all over the world and those first seeds planted in France have grown a network of nine monasteries dedicated to continuing the work that Thay had begun so many years before.

Groups are open to people of all faiths and none and include tailor-made interest groups for young people, families, BPOC practitioners, the LGBTQIA+ community, and people engaged with environmental protection. A monastic community of hundreds of monks and nuns are creating innovative ways of accessing the Dharma, including a free, and ad-free Plum Village App, online retreats and courses and travel widely leading retreats around the world.

As yet, however, there is no practice centre in the UK, but that is about to change.

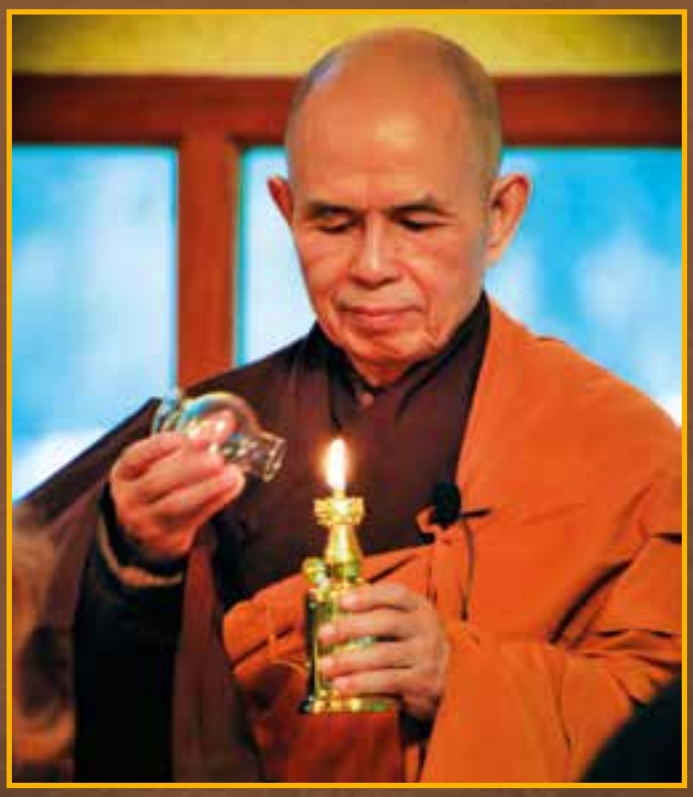
Thay first asked his UK students to create a practice centre in the UK in 1997, and gave the centre the name 'Being Peace'. A small cottage attached to a school field studies centre was the first step towards realising Thay's vision. Being Peace Cottage saw many retreats, especially those aimed at families, guided by monks and nuns from Plum Village and the ever-growing UK lay community.

By 2018 the community had grown enough to be able to form a team with the skills and experience necessary to fundraise for a larger centre that could eventually become a monastery, and there is every possibility, as a property is now being seriously considered, that we will have the Being Peace Practice Centre up and running by September 2025.

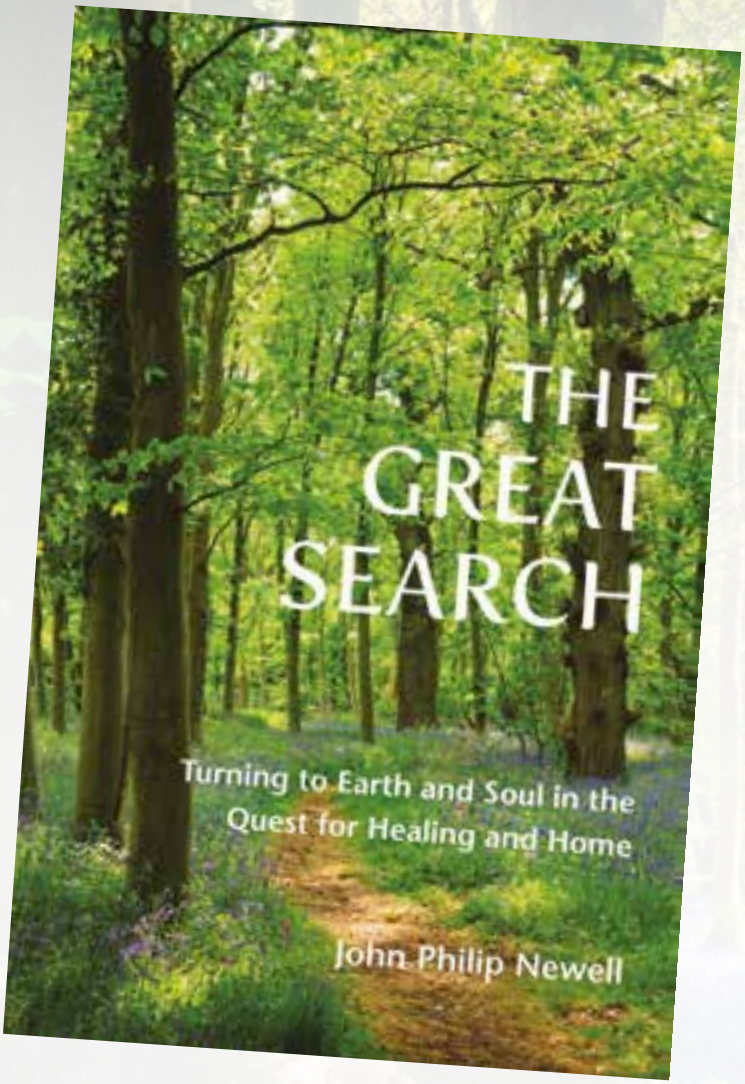
Teri West, a UK Dharma teacher ordained by Thich Nhat Hanh in 2016 writes:

I was present when Thay first asked us to establish a centre, and fairly new to the practice. I had met Thay in Plum Village in 1988, when I was suffering greatly from trauma experienced in my youth. I had no particular spiritual path myself, only that of trying to be a good citizen, and unaware at the time how much I needed the spiritual practices that Thay's teaching offered. I was immediately caught by his presence, and when I heard him ask for a UK centre, made an internal vow that I would bring the small amount of fundraising experience I had gained through working with Colin at a pioneering school in Devon, towards helping to create a centre in the UK.

A group of monastics from Plum Village are now committed to being resident at the centre for up to 3 months each year, and the community looks forward with great happiness to being able to offer a place of healing and transformation, refuge and restoration, open to those of all faiths and none, and from all backgrounds. The Being Peace Practice Centre will fulfill Colin's wish for a place of inter-faith dialogue and practice, and offer a model for a way of living and working, based on community.



To find out more, go to *https://beingpeace.uk*



John Philip Newell's new book 'The Great Search' presents the wisdom of nine great visionaries (ten, if you include John Philip Newell himself). He raises awareness of the ecological challenges we face and our spiritual yearning to find expression and understanding in both traditional and new teachings. We are delighted to present an extarct of Newell's introduction and chapter four 'Seeking Awareness: Carl Jung'.

Introduction Extract

Search and you will find. – Matthew 7:7

We are living through a time of immense transition as old systems of authority and belief are questioned. A new vision of reality is trying to be born. Earth and humanity need healing. The way we have lived on this planet is unsustainable. And the way our societies are plagued by racism, injustice and violence is wrong. We need change. Religion as we have known it has failed to adequately address the most urgent challenges of humanity, including the threatened plight of Earth. These challenges are not just ecological, and political, and economic. They are also spiritual. That is why there is a quest of soul today for new depths of wisdom to guide us into well-being, both individually and together.

Something new is emerging. We need to listen to the stirrings of the Spirit within us and within the body of Earth, and change. The good news is that our spiritual traditions have changed in the past and can change again. In Christianity, for instance, there was the Great Schism of the eleventh century that reflected the distinctness of East and West in the unfolding life of the church. Or there was the Great Reformation of sixteenth-century Europe that spawned massive protest for change and questioned old hierarchies of domination. Similarly, there was the Great Awakening of eighteenth- century America that gave birth to more personal expressions of faith. Today we are in another era of change, perhaps the most important we have ever faced in the history of our religious inheritance. It can be called the Great Search. We are seeking healing as an Earth community, and we are longing for a new sense of home spiritually. Vast numbers of us have left the four walls of institutional religion. Others are choosing to stay. But whether we remain in the religious traditions of our birth or move beyond them, we need new vision if we are to find healing in our relationship with Earth and one another.

"Seek and you will find," says Jesus. This is the promise at the heart of the Great Search today. And it is the hope that inspires the writing of this book.

Chapter Four

Seeking Awareness: Carl Jung

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), the founder of analytical psychology, said that humanity's "worst sin" is lack of awareness, or "unconsciousness", as he termed it.[1] When we are unaware of what is happening within us, or oblivious to what is occurring around us, we are more likely to stumble in the dark than walk in the light. We are prone to confusion. This is as true of us individually as it is together. What are the things we need to be more aware of in our lives and world, in relation to Earth and one another as nations and races, and in our own inner depths as individuals? No matter how uncomfortable it may be to grow in awareness, nor how challenging and even painful, Jung calls us into greater and greater consciousness. The journey into wholeness will not happen without it.

Despite our frequent lack of awareness, including our capacity to deny reality, deep within us is an instinct for consciousness. "Within the soul," said Jung, "from its primordial beginnings there has been a desire for light."[2] Not only physical light but spiritual light, a desire to see, both inwardly and outwardly.

Religion in its origins was an attempt to address this longing for awareness. Jung questions, however, whether our religious traditions have penetrated deeply enough beneath the surface. Many of us today share Jung's doubt. Is our desire for light being sufficiently nurtured by religion as we know it? If not, how do we more fully access the yearnings of the Spirit within us? And how can our religious traditions more deeply serve these yearnings?

Jung is a messenger to us of the healing energies of consciousness. By training and profession, he was a psychoanalyst, delving into the depths of the "psyche", a term that is derived from the Greek word *psukhe*, which means "soul". He can be described most simply, therefore, as a doctor of the soul seeking to bring wholeness and healing to human life by accessing the longings for light that are within us. He calls us to grow in awareness, both individually and together, no matter where it takes us, in the confidence that awareness is essential on the pathway to truth.

For Jung the inner world of the soul is as boundless as the outer world of the universe in its vast stretches of light and dark that reach endlessly through time and space. The human soul is like a microcosm of the macrocosm, an inner universe that corresponds to the infinity of the outward universe. Jung begins his autobiographical work *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* by quoting the nineteenth-century poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who said that a person who is seeking awareness of the human soul is like an astronomer exploring the heavens. "He looked at his own Soul with a Telescope," wrote Coleridge. "What seemed all irregular, he saw and shewed to be beautiful Constellations; and he added to the Consciousness hidden worlds within worlds."[3]

For Jung there are hidden worlds within the world of the soul. And at the heart of it all is the "valley of diamonds", as he called it, a place of immortal shining of light through which we have all passed in our journey of birth into this world.[4] This is not to romanticize life. "The world into which we are born is brutal and cruel," he wrote, yet at the same time it is full of "divine beauty".[5] Awareness of both the light and the dark, the brutality of life as well as its beauty, is vital to our healing. It helps reconnect us to the true heart of our being.

Jung uses the word soul, but he is wary of religion's attempts to pin the word down with precision and limit it only to the human species. The soul is not only the breath of human life. It is the breath of all life, the *anima mundi*, the animating life force of the universe. It is the vital spark in all things, distinct but not separate from our physicalness. The light of the soul can be glimpsed in one another's eyes and in the vitality of every life-form. It is a "glancing, Aeolian thing," he said, "elusive as a butterfly."[6] We cannot define it, but we can know its stirrings and motions within us and in everything that has life.

Christianity speaks about human beings having an immortal soul, but, as Jung said, it generally "has very few kind words" to say about the soul.[7] In most Western Christian thought, the soul has been described as sinful and ignorant rather than beautiful and sparkling with light. But for Jung our "true quintessence" is the *imago Dei*, the eternal likeness of the divine within us.[8] In his professional writings as a psychologist, he refers to this as the "God-Image" deep in every person. In his autobiography, however, toward the end of his life, when he is showing himself more openly to the world, Jung refers to our essence simply as "God".[9] "Like every other being," he says, "I am a splinter of the infinite deity."[10] We come from the divine. And at the core of our being we shine, like the translucence of jewels in sunlight.

The great challenge for religion today is to return to the realm of enabling an experiential knowledge of the divine within us and among us rather than simply instilling an acceptance of creedal statements about the divine. The direct and immediate encounter of God in the body of Earth and one another, and deep within our own souls, is at the inception of all great religion. The problem is that these original experiences of the divine that gave rise to our religious traditions have "stiffened into mere objects of belief," said Jung, rather than being viewed as expressions of how we can continue to know the divine.[11] **"The bridge from dogma to the inner experience of the individual has broken down,"** he said.[12]

Jung tells the story of one of his clients, a Swiss theologian, who dreamed that he was standing on the slope of a mountain looking out over a beautiful valley covered in dense forest. In the dream the theologian knew there was a lake in the middle of the woods, but he had never visited it before. Now, however, he was determined to reach the waters. As he approached the lake, the atmosphere grew mysterious, and suddenly "a light gust of wind passed over the surface of the water".[13] And he woke with a cry of terror.

Jung believed that the wind that passed over the surface of the waters in the dream was the Spirit that blows where it wills. It was this that terrified the dreamer, an immediate experience of the divine. For the theologian, the Spirit was something to be read about in the Bible or religiously adhered to in religious creeds. It was not a living mystery to be encountered in the depths of one's own being. The experience of the presence of the divine moving over the waters of his soul was terrifying for the theologian. Where did it come from and where was it going? So, instead of the forest being enchanted, it became a haunted woods, and he was seized with terror. Sometimes we fear the immediacy of the divine. It becomes entirely a *mysterium tremendum* (a mystery that frightens), as the writer Rudolf Otto named it, rather than also a *mysterium fascinosum* (a mystery that attracts).[14]

In 1882 when Nietzsche said, "God is dead ... we have killed him," he was not making a comment about the existence, or nonexistence, of God.[15] Rather, he was indicating that our experience of the divine has died. Similarly, Jung said that "the present is a time of God's death and disappearance."[16] By this he meant that religion has become focused on doctrines *about* the divine rather than experiences *of* the divine. Deep in our souls, however, there is a longing for the Spirit, not by proxy but by direct experience. It is a yearning for life's immediacy, both spiritually and physically, like "the warm red blood pulsating" within our veins, said Jung.[17]

The death and disappearance of God, as Jung put it, has led to the modern decline of religion. When he was a boy, only twelve years of age, Jung had a prophetic intuition of the coming collapse of Western Christianity. Walking home from school one day, as he passed through the cathedral square of Basel, he became aware of an image that so shocked him that he hid it away in his unconscious for decades, until finally in his sixties he was able to look at it again and speak about it. What he saw within himself that day as a schoolboy in the cathedral square of Basel was God sitting on a golden throne high above the world, and from under the throne an "enormous turd" fell, crashing through the sparkling new roof of the cathedral, shattering it to pieces and breaking the walls asunder.[18]

We are living in the midst of the great turd falling. And it is not just falling. It has already smashed into the edifice of Western Christianity, and the walls of religion are crumbling. As Jung later wrote, "God refuses to abide by traditions, no matter how sacred."[19] If religion fails to enable a direct experience of the divine, depending instead solely on the testimony of great teachers and prophets of the past, it will collapse. If it is not pulsating with the warm red blood of experience and a fresh awareness of the living presence of the Spirit within us and among us, it serves no useful purpose for the well-being of humanity and Earth today.

Carl Jung was born in the Swiss town of Kesswil on the shores of Lake Constance, but he spent most of his boyhood farther along the Rhine in the city of Basel, the cultural capital of Switzerland. There his father, Paul Jung, was a Swiss Reformed pastor, upright and orthodox, living in accordance with the doctrines of the church. His mother, on the other hand, Emilie Preiswerk, was a woman of "hearty animal warmth", as Jung described her.[20] Although she outwardly conformed to the teachings and practices of Swiss Reformed Christianity, there was another side to her that shone with the wisdom of the natural world. She was like "a priestess in a bear's cave," said Jung.[21] She knew things that were not simply derived from books and common opinion but from a deeper source within herself. The relationship between mother and father was a marriage of opposites. His father was like the theo logian terrified by dreaming of the Spirit that swept as a wind over the waters. Religion for Paul Jung was about consent to propositional statements about God rather than about direct experience of the untamed Spirit that blows where it wills. His mother, on the other hand, had a mind in tune with natural sources. It welled up from Earth, said Jung, like a natural spring and brought with it intuitive wisdom. Jung witnessed in his parents two different types of knowing, one guided by reason and intellect, the other by intuition and feeling. His father's way of knowing often frustrated him as a young man, confined as it was to the mind. His mother's way of knowing had at times frightened him as a boy, issuing forth from some hidden source within her. In time Jung's path of knowledge brought both reason and intuition, the intellect and feeling, into a creative unity of knowing.

Our journey into awareness needs both these ways, the head as well as the heart, reason as well as intuition. And part of what we are being invited to be aware of comes to us through our parents and the long descent of ancestors through whom we have come into being. **Our inheritance is both physical and spiritual.** Just as the body has a physical prehistory of millions of years, so it is with the soul. The past lives in us, "in our very blood," he said.[22] The practice of awareness, therefore, takes us deep into our own history.

Jung had a dream that opened him to a greater awareness of the layers of inheritance that he carried within himself from the past. In the dream, he was in the upper storey of a house which he did not recog nize but knew to be his own. There were precious old paintings on the wall that intrigued him. It then occurred to him that he didn't know anything about the lower floor of the house, so he descended the stairs to the ground level. There everything was much older and darker, and he realized it probably dated to the fifteenth or sixteenth century. As he wandered from room to room, he began to think, *Now I really must explore the whole house!* He came upon a heavy door and opened it. Beyond the door he discovered a stone stairway that led down into a cellar. Descending again, he found himself in a beautifully vaulted room that looked ancient. Examining the walls, he discovered layers of brick among the ordinary stone blocks, and realized the room dated to Roman times. His interest by now was fully aroused. He looked more closely at the stone slabs on the floor, and in one of these he discovered a ring. When he pulled it, the stone slab lifted, and again he saw another stairway of narrow steps leading farther and farther into the depths. These too he descended and came to a low cave cut into the rock. Thick dust lay on the floor, and in the dust were scattered bones and broken pottery, like the remains of a primitive culture. Also on the floor were two human skulls, very old and half disintegrated. Then he awoke.[23]

We carry the past within us, both the immediate past of our families and the distant past of our species. Awareness leads us into both the conscious and unconscious dimensions of our being. It invites us to be alert to what we have already known and experienced in our lives, as well as to what we don't yet know and the immense history that flows through us unconsciously from those who have gone before. Intuition, said Jung, is perception through our unconscious depths whereas reason is perception through the conscious mind. Our conscious side is but the tip of an iceberg. Most of who we are is hidden in the waters of the unconscious. True self-knowledge, therefore, is not just about our conscious self. It includes paying attention to our unknown depths which come to us most readily through intuition and dreams and the imagination. These depths arise from within us not on demand but by their own prompting. They come as pure gift. Our role is simply to be ready to receive them into our conscious self and translate them in our lives into action and relationship.

Awareness that comes to us via the unconscious can be described as "moon-like", says Jung.[24] Awareness via the conscious mind, on the other hand, is sun-like. We need both. The moon's white radiance in the dark night sky invites us to be aware of the mystery that we are part of and the essential oneness of everything around us. The hard edges of day are softened, and we are more aware of the interrelationship of all things than the distinctness of each thing. When we walk under the sun's light, on the other hand, we are more attentive to the uniqueness of each part. Moon-like awareness and sun-like awareness are given to complete each other. Our task is to be attentive to what the Spirit is bringing to our awareness, whether through the conscious or the unconscious within us, and to remain alert to both the light and the shadow, the beauty and the brokenness that exist within us individually and among us collectively.

Years ago, I had a dream in which I was trying to sneak into Jung's personal study at the top of his Bollingen Tower on the shores of Lake Zurich. It was for him a place of solitude into which he invited very few people. I thought he wasn't in, so I was ascending a spiral staircase which, in the dream, was on the outside of the building rather than the inside. Suddenly Jung popped his head out of the study window above me and said in his heavily accented English, "Come up." When I reached the top of the stairs, I found that we weren't in fact in the study but on the flat roof of the tower from which we could see in every direction. We then began to take turns playing an ancient instrument that was like a precursor of the French horn. Our intention was to sound the lowest note possible. At one point I was standing behind Jung, massaging his neck and shoulders, thinking that, if I could relax him, he would manage to sound the lowest note. Sure enough, it came, a long deep sound that issued forth as if from the beginning of time.

In response to the sounding of the note, people came out of the woods from the four directions carrying rolled-up animal hides that they placed on the ground in front of us. They then unfurled the hides, and within them we could see the remains of human beings who had died centuries, even millennia, earlier. The skeletons all bore the marks of violence, axe blows to the head, spear thrusts to the ribs, signs of the woundedness and brokenness that come down to us from the past in our families and cultures and nations.

Awareness, importantly, is not just about the light that is within us. **The Spirit is inviting us to know also the pain and suffering, the wrong and violence that we carry deep in the memory of our bodies and souls.** Awareness of both is essential in our journey toward wholeness.

The part to be played by religion in all this is immense, reconnecting us to what has been torn apart, the conscious from the unconscious, the rational mind from the intuitive, the West from the East, humanity from Earth. For, in essence, religion is about "the completeness of life," said Jung, "a life which contains both sides."[25] Religion evolved originally to hold life together, Heaven and Earth, spirit and matter, the head and the heart, the physical and the spiritual. The origins of the word *religion* speak of its purpose. It is derived from the Latin *religare*, which means to bind back together. It is this that our religious traditions urgently need to do again, to open our awareness to both the outer and inner world, the known and the unknown, the past and the present, the seen and the unseen, all of which exist within us and among us as individuals and together.

In 1907 Jung met Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. It was to be a relationship of great significance for both men even though it eventually ended in painful disagreement about the nature of the human soul. Jung was almost twenty years Freud's junior, and still a young man when the relationship began. Their first meeting in Vienna was one of deep mutual attraction and engagement, resulting in a conversation that lasted thirteen hours! What followed were six years of intense correspondence and collaboration. Freud even came to see Jung as his adopted son and successor.

The differences that eventually emerged between them, however, were significant. Freud believed that the human soul is most deeply characterized by the sex drive and an instinct for aggression. Jung, on the other hand, came to see our essence as spiritual. Our sexual yearnings, therefore, are part of the God-Image within us, expressions of a sacred desire for oneness and interrelationship. To put it theologically, Freud was speaking the language of original sin. Jung, on the other hand, was speaking the language of original blessing.

Freud refused to consider Jung's developing ideas about the human soul and formally broke with him in 1913, as did most of the psychoanalytical world at the time. Jung was left virtually alone in the professional world of psychology. In the same year he suffered a psychotic breakdown and entered a time of isolation for nearly six years. The personal cost of his rupture with Freud was huge. But it was also a defining moment in his journey. As he later wrote, "Only the wounded physician heals."[26] Only to the extent that we know our own brokenness can we help minister wholeness to others. In the end, Jung's own woundedness played an enormous part in enabling him to be a bearer of healing in the world.

Around the same time as his personal breakdown, he became aware of a foreboding collapse among the European world of nations. As he later described it, "In October [1913], while I was alone on a journey, I was suddenly seized by an overpowering vision: I saw a monstrous flood covering all the northern and low-lying lands between the North Sea and the Alps... I realized that a frightful catastrophe was in pro gress. I saw the mighty yellow waves, the floating rubble of civilization, and the drowned bodies of uncounted thousands. Then the whole sea turned to blood."[27]

The vision recurred over the next number of weeks, and in the spring of 1914 a similar dream came to him three times. In August of that year, World War I began. The sea of blood was becoming a reality. Jung now saw more clearly than ever what his task in life was to be. He was to try to understand the relationship between inner well-being and outward well-being. For the outer world and the inner world are not two separate worlds. They are one. And the way we seek wholeness within us as individuals relates also to the way we are to seek wholeness together. They both need the Spirit's healing energies of awareness.

During these years of personal struggle and growth, and afterward in his work with clients, Jung used mandalas, in addition to dreams and active imagination, as a tool of awareness. The Sanskrit word *mandala* means circle. They appear in all the great spiritual traditions of humanity, ranging from Buddhist sand mandalas in the East to rose windows in the Christian cathedrals of the West, as well as the medicine wheels of Native American tribes and the bora mandalas of indigenous Australians. Jung saw that the circle represents a striving for wholeness. It is a symbol of the oneness of the universe in which so-called opposites are held together, the sun and the moon, light and dark, the masculine and the feminine, East and West. Everything belongs within the circle. Our challenge is to become aware of the interrelationship of all things, and how opposites are given to complete each other. He described the mandala as a refuge of inner reconciliation and wholeness. In working with mandalas, he was seeking to know the relationship between the things that divide us, both within ourselves individually as well as collectively in the world. It was a way of seeking reintegration and balance.

The problem of "the union of opposites," said Jung, is at the heart of our collective struggles in the world as well as our personal journeys.[28] The more inattentive we are to bringing opposites back into relationship, "the more the devil drives" us on, he said.[29] We tear apart what belongs together. Nothing exists without its opposite, said Jung. The life of one species or one nation relates to the life of every species and every nation, even those that may seem entirely different to us. Failure to integrate so-called opposites in our lives and world, said Jung, leads to "a painful fragmentariness" in life and a ripping apart of Earth's essential oneness.[30]

We remain unintegrated when we refuse the meeting and mingling of opposites within us. This is as true collectively as it is individually. The deepest energies of our being are given to find wholeness in relationship to all things, not in isolation. And for Jung the "supreme pair of opposites" is the combination of masculine and feminine energies that run through us all.[31] By this, he did not simply mean the relationship between men and women, or male and female. He meant the marriage of opposites within us that express themselves distinctly as masculine on the one hand and feminine on the other. They are not dualities, he said, they are polarities, joined by a continuous spectrum of life's deepest energies flowing through us and through the body of Earth. And they find their completion in oneness, not in separation. This is why true sexual union is an "experience of the divine," says Jung.[32] It is not merely an expression of libido energies driven by the desire for self-satisfaction, as Freud argued. It is a deep longing of the Spirit in the human soul for the oneness from which we and all things have come.

Part of the marriage of opposites relates also to the relationship between good and evil in our lives and world. Jung more and more came to see that the roots of both good and evil are found in all of us. During times of conflict and war, for instance, we are to look for goodness in our so-called enemy as well as in ourselves. Similarly, we are to be alert to the presence of evil within us, and in our own people and our own nation, as well as in those who are opposed to us. If we are to truly engage with the problem of evil, said Jung, and be part of reconciliation in the world, we must first confront the falseness in our own souls before we look for it in our enemies. We will find good and evil, light and darkness, love and hatred, within us as well as beyond us.

This again is where the true heart of religion can strengthen us in the journey. And, as Jung makes clear, it is a journey into wholeness, not a journey into "perfection".[33] It is not a matter of perfectly conforming to some outward standard of religious belief and behaviour. It is a matter of opening to the Spirit's yearning for integration in the depths of our being, and then bringing the heart of who we are into true relationship with the heart of one another and Earth.

The greatest obstacle to the work of wholeness in our lives is the shadow side of our ego when it tries to be lord of the manor, as it were, in charge of the whole house of our being instead of simply a servant to the soul in the domestic quarters of our life. The ego is forever trying to make things easy for itself rather than serving true relationship in our lives and world. We need to "celebrate a Last Supper" with our ego, says Jung.[34] Not just once but again and again. We need to die to the separating energies of the ego that we may live from our true depths in union with the divine in Earth and one another. This is where religion can serve us if we will allow it again to enable the essential work of self-giving for the sake of wholeness. Jung reminds us that the word *sacrifice* is derived from the Latin *sacrificare*, which means to make holy or to make whole. Religion in its truest expressions, including spiritual practice and discipline, is about making us whole again by freeing us from imprisonment to the ego, whether that be the individual ego of our personhood or the collective ego of our nation or race or species.

This is not to put down the ego which is our sacred faculty of consciousness and willpower. Without a strong and healthy ego, we will not be able to grow in awareness and choose the path of true inter relationship with Earth and one another. The ego, however, is given not to be the centre but to serve the centre. It is given not to call attention to itself but to focus on the divine presence at the heart of all being. Our ego needs "the illumination of a holy and whole-making spirit," says Jung.[35] This is the work of the Spirit, or "the uniter of opposites", as he calls it.[36] **It is the breath of the divine in our depths that enables us to let go of our ego to serve what is greater than the self, the Life within all life, the Self within all selves.**

Because the soul is an "interior microcosm" of the universe, our journey of healing is not something that happens in separation but in relation to all things.[37] It is not a journey that shuts out the world but gathers the world into itself. "Everything hangs together with everything else," said Jung.[38] So, integration in our own depths involves integration with the world. Jung calls it the *unus mundus*, the one world, the interior realm of the soul and the outer realm of the universe conjoined. True wholeness brings the inner and the outer together, the personal and the collective, the soul of the individual and the soul of Earth united.

This shaped Jung's approach to the Christ-figure in his understanding of Christian myth. He saw Christ as manifesting the soul of the world, not simply the soul of a particular individual who lived two thousand years ago. The Christ-figure was archetypal to Jung, revealing "the hidden, unconscious ground-life of every individual".[39] The journey into wholeness, therefore, is not achieved by an imitation of a Christ-figure of the past, as so much religious teaching has given the impression over the centuries. We are not being called to become like another. We are being called to become ourselves and to live from the divine depths of our being. Christ is an icon of the truly human, said Jung, showing us the divinity that is within each of us. As Jesus said to his listeners, "you are gods" (John 10:34). In other words, within you is the divine, waiting to come forth in unique ways from the inner wellspring of your being.

Jung had a powerful dream of Christ on the Cross. He was bathed in bright light and his body was made of "greenish gold".[40] It was a beautiful dream that deeply touched Jung and reminded him of the quest of medieval alchemy, which was to turn so-called "base metals" into "noble metals", and in particular gold. Jung knew, of course, that serious alchemy had never actually been about changing the substance of matter itself. Rather it was about seeking the golden world of the Spirit within this world or, more specifically, accessing the transformative spiritual energies that are deep in the human soul and the body of Earth.

The green gold of Christ's body in the dream spoke to Jung of the relationship between the *anima Christi* (the soul of Christ) and the *anima mundi* (the soul of the world). In essence they are one. Just as Earth's greening power rises from deep within, so the golden essence of the Spirit rises from within us. And the purest gold of our being, Jung believed, is our capacity for love. This for him was the meaning of the dream. Love "bears all things" and "endures all things", as scripture says. "Love never ends" (1 Cor. 13:7–8). These words express it all, said Jung. "Nothing can be added to them."[41] Love is our greatest strength. It rises from the God-essence, or the gold-essence, of our being just as the greening energies of Earth rise from deep within.

If we are to grow in awareness of the oneness of the Christ-mystery and the Cosmos-mystery, and if we are to know in new ways that the inner world of the soul and the outer world of the universe are essentially one, then religious vision needs to be reimagined and expanded. "Christianity slumbers," said Jung, for it has neglected to keep nurturing its essential insights into Earth and the human mystery over the centuries.[42] We need to take its thought-forms that have become historically fixed, he said, and "melt them down again" that we may pour them into new moulds of awareness for this moment in time.[43] In other words, we need to allow our experiences of divine light within us and in all things to reshape our unfolding story of faith for today. We need "to dream the myth onwards," he says, and give it deeper and broader expression.[44] For life "is a flux, a flowing into the future, not a stoppage or backwash."[45] It is not a matter of going back to something that was, trying to make Christianity great again, for instance. It is a matter of allowing our faith to live in ever-new ways, forever flowing into greater and greater awareness.

Jung died on June 6, 1961. Inscribed on his gravestone are words in Latin that he had also etched into stone over the front door of his house in Switzerland, "*Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit*" (Bidden or not bidden, God is present). Jung had become more and more aware of the presence of the divine in all things. In his BBC *Face to Face* interview with John Freeman just two years before his death, he was asked by Freeman if he believed in God. "I don't need to believe," said Jung. "I know." He had experienced hidden worlds in the world of the soul, and at the heart of it all was God.

If humanity's worst sin is lack of awareness, as Jung had said, then our greatest blessing is to be aware, particularly of the presence of the divine within us and within all things. But for Jung, to be aware, or to know, as he put it, was not the same thing as claiming to understand. He spoke of God as the mystery of love that is beyond understanding, and increasingly he spoke of himself in similar terms. "The older I have become," as he said in his autobiography, "the less I have understood... myself."[46]

Jung resisted fixed systems of thought, including even systems of thought that others had created to systematize his own psychological insights. "I'm glad to be Carl Jung," as he is sometimes quoted as saying, "and not a Jungian." It wasn't fixed systems of thought that he pursued in his life. It was experiential knowledge. And his mind had been humbled by his encounter with the constellations of light that appear beyond numbering in the human soul, galaxy upon galaxy of inner light. In that place of light in our depths he experienced "kinship," as he put it, with everything that has being.[47] Perhaps this is his greatest gift of awareness, knowing the family likeness of all things, the seen and the unseen, the East and the West, the past and the present, the one and the many, humanity and Earth. It is this awareness that led him into a knowing of the deepest mystery, love, the love that calls us to see the other as our self. It is this knowing that will most powerfully serve us in our journey toward wholeness, both individually and together. The journey of awareness is, at the end of the day, a journey of love, love for Earth and one another, and love for ourselves.

MEDITATIVE PRACTICE: SEEKING AWARENESS

Carl Jung is a messenger of awareness to us. He invites us to be alert with love to the light and the shadow, the good and the evil, the beginnings and endings of life that are within us, and to remember the Valley of Diamonds through which we have all travelled in our journey of birth into this world. We come from light, and it is our longing for light that will save us.

(pause to listen for what Jung's wisdom stirs in us)

As morning mist scatters from among the hills
so my soul longs to see again
both light and dark
both height and depth
the one and the many
my life and every life
intertwined
and each a unique manifestation of the divine.

(pause to be aware)

As morning mist scatters from among the hills
so my soul longs to see again.

1. C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious: The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 9, part 1, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1990), 253.
2. C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Vintage, 1989), 269.
3. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, v.
4. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 104.
5. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 358.
6. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 211.
7. C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion: The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 11, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 17.
8. C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis: The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 14, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 478.
9. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, xi.
10. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 4.
11. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 8.
12. C. G. Jung, *Aion: The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol 9, part 2, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 178.
13. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 141.
14. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).
15. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974).
16. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 90.
17. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 50.
18. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 39.
19. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 40.
20. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 48.
21. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 50.
22. C. G. Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Ark, 1992), 72.
23. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 158–59.
24. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 180.
25. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 42.
26. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 134.
27. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 175.
28. Jung, *Aion*, 87.
29. Jung, *Aion*, 166.
30. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 193.
31. Jung, *Aion*, 268.
32. Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine*, 44.
33. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 428.
34. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 364.
35. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 180.
36. Jung, *Aion*, 86.
37. Jung, *Aion*, 164.
38. Jung, *Aion*, 143.
39. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 89.
40. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 210–11.
41. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 354.
42. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 331.
43. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 89.
44. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 160.
45. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 164.
46. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 358.
47. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 359.

Faith and the Artist

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

The 'Journeyman' watercolours.
2022-2024 by Rupert Bathurst.

The filmmaker Alan Parker described 'A Rake's Progress, 1732-34', a series of eight paintings by William Hogarth, as an ancestor to the storyboard. They depict the decline and fall of Tom Rakewell, son of a rich merchant who wastes his inheritance through decadent living, ending up imprisoned and ultimately in Bedlam, the famous madhouse of the day…

As a recovering addict, who experienced a similar journey as a young man, but who was fortunate enough to find help and a powerful structure for recovery, I have made my own series of watercolour paintings, titled 'Journeyman 2022-24'.

Their starting point is from a place of shame and despair, moving out gradually towards light, serenity and ultimately redemption: a 'Rakes Progress' in reverse.

These paintings are very loosely based on the 12 Steps, the structure behind many recovery fellowships and programmes, which were designed in the 1930's as a series of actions required to climb out of the bondage of self-centred fear and consequent addiction; to make peace with one's past and then amends to one's fellows, before being promised a spiritual awakening and the foundations needed to self-forget, and to finally become a responsible and productive member of society.

The character at the heart of these paintings is autobiographical, in the guise of an "All Licensed Fool" (from King Lear) , with a god-shaped hole at the centre of his/my being.

THEIR STARTING POINT IS FROM A PLACE OF SHAME AND DESPAIR, MOVING OUT GRADUALLY TOWARDS LIGHT, SERENITY AND ULTIMATELY REDEMPTION

The first panel depicts a prone figure drenched in shame, hovering above the suggestion of a coffin.

The final panel is a figure in blissful flight, shedding his past troubles, serenely flying over a peaceful city at night, full of vivid colour and spiritual magnificence.

These 16 panels were exhibited as a set at Bernard Shapiro in Bond Street in July 2023.

I am currently working on three large oil paintings. These are again based on the Journeyman series but are now distilled down to three distinct phases : 'Shamebolt', 'Emergence', 'Redemption'.

They are currently unfinished, and the character at the centre of the narratives is no longer in costume but stripped down to bare flesh and muscle. It is important to me that the visceral feelings of despair come across in the first panel. And the bleached figure in the second, emerging from a broken landscape of human bondage, should communicate a sense of awe visited by a technicolour rendition of a powerful spiritual experience. Blinded by the light.

The inspiration behind these abstracted renditions of a "spiritual awakening" are the works of Hilma af Klimt, whose colourfield paintings, full of mysterious symbolism still connect with new viewers over a hundred years after their creation.

To reach a broader audience, with the hope of connecting with those struggling with depression or addiction today, I am also making moves towards creating a modest book, containing these series of new paintings, accompanied by anonymous anecdotes from fellow recovering addicts, about their own personal journeys away from desperation into a new optimistic perspective on their lives.

***'Emergence'**. Oil on canvas 2025. In progress...*

www.rupertbathurst.com

Photograph by Monica Smith