



The Journal of Patapsco Friends Meeting

July, 2010

Editor's Note

This issue of the Quaker Heron has been a long time in the making, but I think the product is worthwhile and timely. Maybe others will be stimulated by the thoughts expressed herein and will want to send in their own articles on this same topic. Such additional articles can be included in a subsequent issue.

The topic of this issue is “our spiritual journeys.” I have been impressed and influenced by the spiritual journeys and achievements of many people over time, but want to mention just one for this issue. He was a Philadelphia Quaker named William Bacon Evans. When I used to attend Friends General Conference gatherings with my parents – which at that time occurred every other year and were always at Cape May, New Jersey – we would often see William Bacon Evans. He wore the plain dress and often had an arrow seemingly stuck through his head (one half was stuck to one side of his hat, and the other half to the other). He also carried little wooden blocks in his pocket to pull out and give people so that they could see if they could put together a tetrahedron (a pyramid). His life seemed to have the motif of connecting with other people at a child-like level – or, to put it another way – at a basic human level without noting pretension or status. His life, it seemed to me, was lived in a deeply spiritual way and in a non-threatening manner, challenged us all to try to do the same.

I have enjoyed reading about the spiritual journeys of people from Patapsco and South Mountain and found myself being inspired by their accounts, as well. Let us all support each other in living at a spiritual level, however that manifests itself for each of us.

Happy summer reading.
From Ramona

The Sacred Space

Quiggled by Stuart Green

Through his ghost; A Message by Us
for Us

During the several weeks I contemplated writing something about the ‘sacred space,’ my thoughts were stuck largely on the question, “What is the sacred space?” I wondered if Friends used the phrase much since I hadn’t observed it in Quaker literature very often. It was, however, the phrase that has illuminated the activities of my last five years. It has been a phrase of mission for me. I was led to acknowledge it and revere it, welcome it into my outer consciousness and invite it to stay, and if it liked, to become richer and thicker with the thought that it might also become more apparent to others.

An Early Friends epiphany speaks to my leading on sacred space, “the stillness is where Creation communes and communicates; words are labeling tools inadequate to transmit ideas and should only be used when they improve the silence.” I intend to limit my words, especially charged words

commonly used to express spiritual ideas or concepts.

In this sacred space, I attempt to communicate ideas as I am led - the sacred space between a reader's eyes and paper, the speaker's mouth and the listener's ear, or the quiet stillness within and around is where ideas are kept, ripe for the plucking. Early Friends spoke of the story of Adam eating the forbidden apple, imploring people not to focus on the apple, but to see the spaces within and around that merge in and out of the ghosts of "things". This movement and merging of seeming nothingness is what makes us one in the sacred space. One "thing" that isn't a thing,

Our earthly life, including the apples, and all our visible 'things', and the profoundness of the sacred space within and around that enables things, and ideas to move and transform are to be cherished, and the opportunities for its renewal protected. This is our one important earthly mission. For this Space is sacred because it is the spring of life and living. The Space is accessible. It is in and around our ghosts of form and with or without the form, it is us - (me, you, the source of and beyond creation). We are 'what is'.

Listening to your Truth

By Jim Rose

And Friends meet together, and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was.

George Fox, Epistle 149

In one sentence George Fox illuminates the core of Quakerism that informs the life of the spirit for me, for each individual, and for the Quaker Meeting as a whole. This one simple phrase sets forth the spiritual tasks of Quakers: we are to meet together; we are to know one another in that which is eternal.

Certainly each of us is encouraged to follow our individual spiritual path, our inward search for the light, our deep listening to God within. But we are equally encouraged to bring that Light we have found back to the community, and as a community, we are eager to listen to the glimmers of hope, the discoveries of love, the struggles and the acceptance found in those journeys. The community is enriched through this sharing; indeed the Quaker Meeting can be transformed by the words of even the most simple message.

Other religions, other traditions, have emphasized the inward search and the power of discovery. In my life the gift of Quakerism is the realization that we are a community of seekers: we are not alone. The practice of Quakers is to bring the treasures that we find on our journeys back to the Meeting, and for the Meeting to listen with the tender recognition of a shared experience.

The principal characteristic of the human condition may well be that each of us is on a spiritual path, each of us is searching for meaning in our lives, each of us is seeking the essence of Truth. A principal tenet of Quakers everywhere is that seekers who ground their search in love are welcome to our Meetings, to worship with us, to speak their truth, to share their experiences, and to listen carefully to the movement of the Spirit among us.

Each of us has a unique approach to the Truth and our own understanding of the way to the Light, an understanding tempered by our origins, our experiences and our path through the kaleidoscope of family and culture we have encountered. Each of us culls from the storms and calms of our lives an understanding of the world — an appreciation of our place in the varied culture which forms us. And that understanding forms the

foundation of our ability to see the world, to see each other, to hear new words, and to discern how those words impact our own lives.

The passion of Friends is not in limiting or directing Seekers to a particular Truth, a common path. The passion of Friends is in gathering in community to seek truth, all of us humbly listening for the promptings of the spirit. In the silence and in the words and actions of each other we discern the full measure of the light within us and around us. We are not each alone in a world of our own “truth” but united in the common light of the same Spirit. Friends celebrate the variety of paths that we encounter; we rejoice to find kindred souls fully committed to the unique way that they have found. The passion of Friends lies in embracing the diversity of paths, accepting the variety of religious experience which enriches our own understanding of the life of the spirit. Your Truth informs my own. I am not constrained to accept your Truth as my own, but I am encouraged to listen to your testimony, to discern the value of your approach and how it affects my own path.

And oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, everyone learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning and loving one another in several places... For this is the true ground of love and unity, not that such a man walks and does just as I do, but because I feel the same Spirit and life in him... and this is far more pleasing than if he walked in just that track wherein I walk.

Isaac Pennington, 1660

Quakerism has a threefold role for me and for each of us:

- to be intentional about following a spiritual path grounded in love, going deep within to find the ground of our being;
- to bring those findings back to our community, to share our experiences, to tell what has been revealed;
- to be a member of an intentional community of careful listeners, to hear without judgment what is being shared, to suspend our disbelief and allow the witness of our Friends to change our lives.

We are said to have abolished the laity; we are, each of us, ministers of the Truth. We are each of us encouraged to speak of our journey, where our search has led, whom we have met on the way, what has opened our eyes. For change is inevitable: none of us linger over-long at the same spot. Our spiritual journey can lead to surprising places, unexpected encounters, startling revelations.

Others have observed that it is pointless to praise the practice of Quakerism and preach it if nobody is listening. It is much more needful to teach people the art of listening. And how better to teach the art of listening than to practice it. George Fox advised that we should all ‘be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come’. Quakers are called to set a pattern of deep listening, and thereby enrich the life of the spirit for all.

At the same time that we are encouraged to listen deeply to others, we bear the weighty responsibility to actively translate their words, their metaphors, their experiences into expressions that speak to our condition. All speech is metaphor, all words are

packed with nuance, loaded with meaning, connotations, implications and overtones. To hear a person's message is easy; but to listen deeply, to do the work of interpretation, is the Quaker task.

As Gene Hoffman remarks: "I am not talking about listening with the human ear. I am talking about 'discernment,' which means to perceive something hidden and obscure. We must listen with our spiritual ear, the one inside, and this is very different from deciding in advance what is right and what is wrong and then seeking to promote our own agenda. We must literally suspend our disbelief and then listen to learn whether what we hear expands or diminishes our sense of Truth."

Words must not become barriers between us, for no one of us can ever adequately understand or express the truth about God, the depth of our personal spiritual journey, or the essence of what has been revealed to us. Yet words are our tools and we must not be afraid to express the truth we know in the best words we can. We must trust that our faith is robust, compassionate and 'not quick to take offence' [1 Cor 13:4-7], and that the Spirit which gives the words is communicated through them.

As we listen to each other's spiritual journey we are encouraged to translate their words much as we would a foreign language. Although we may never adopt their language as our own, we are enriched and brought closer to each other by the experience of listening outside the comfort of our own religious vocabulary. We rejoice in the variety of religious experience, a diversity that leads us to a deepened understanding of our own path.

The skill of the listener who can go beyond words, who can even go

beyond the conscious meanings behind words and who can listen with the third ear for what is unconsciously being meant by the speaker, furnishes a climate where the most unexpected disclosures occur, where miracles happen. Marcel Proust declaims, "The voyage of discovery lies not in encountering new landscapes, but in seeing with new eyes." And listening with new ears. Friends are, if nothing else, seekers, searchers of the Truth and open to the wisdom of others regardless of the source. Listening is an essential art in this search; truly paying attention to the witness of Friends is central to my search.

My Spiritual Journey

by Joseph Evans

For the first time in my life at the age of 48, I wrote about my spiritual journey, and those passages were recorded in the Prison Journal (April 2008/#5) as published by Sandy Spring Friends Meeting. How coincidental this is since it was Friends from SSFM who visited me at the Jessup prison and provided the enlightenment I experience and try to live by today, even in this prison environment.

Today, my spiritual journey continues. I continue to learn from the Quaker Faith and Practice, with the recent revisions being most helpful. And, I continue to learn from a historical point of view, particularly that of John Woolman. Just when I began to think his writings and interpretations were of an historical perspective only, verses on internal, personal perspective, I find his struggles and conflicts to be just as applicable today. Perhaps not in every instance, but I have begun to find more and more relevance in what John Woolman said and did.

What comes to mind today as I speak about this journey of mine is also in the words of a Friend from Patapsco Meeting who posed this query: "Are we humans on a spiritual journey, or, are we spirits on a human journey?" Hearing this query provided a pause for me to give appreciation to this elder Friend's wisdom, and realize the significance of recorded queries and experiences. The light is for all to see.

Peace.

This contributor is a member of the South Mountain Friends Fellowship at the MCI at Hagerstown.

My Spiritual Journey

by Ed Clark

I was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland by both of my parents. They weren't God-fearing nor even went to Church. They did have me go to Church and Sunday School, but I was really too young to understand God and Jesus. But, I always did feel that someone and/or something was watching over me.

As a teenager, I started hanging with the wrong crowd, drinking, getting high, cutting school, stealing and sleeping around. I started putting my so-called friends, ahead of my family. I finally dropped out of school at 14, ran away and started living on my own from 14-21 years old. I really did a lot of things, but mostly bad. I had a real wild life, living on the edge, as I called it. I could fill many pages about all the violence, all the fights, all the gang fights, all the crimes - mostly petty things, the times, I was stabbed, hit with a baseball bat, the times I was shot at, and the times I was almost shot at, the bad car accidents, the times people tried to run me down with a car. As I look back, I thank God for two things, one, for protecting me. And two, I am

thankful that no one ever lost his life in all that craziness, because there were times when someone could easily have gotten killed. I guess I put myself and my so-called friends at risk many times and we could have been killed and/or killed. But, we didn't.

I remember a song that went something like this "I went out for a ride and never came back." Well, that's what I did on May 2, 1987. And I'm still not back. Me and my so called friends, went out one Friday night, partying all night. By the end of the night (well it was actually morning) it was just me and my so-called best friend Tony. We were thinking how to get into this new boat marina to steal a boat motor. To make a long story short, a police officer came along, we had some words, he went for his gun, I had a hammer, so I hit him. We took his gun, got in my car and had a high speed chase. We got away that morning, but were eventually caught a week later. At my trial, Tony became a state's witness against me. For his testimony, he received a 10-year sentence. I ended up getting 65 years in prison. I have almost 14 years in now.

I have tried everything under the Sun. But, I never tried the "SON." Then one day this Christian named Greg asked me if I knew Jesus and would I like to go to Church with him. I thought, "Why not? I have tried everything else." Two things stood out for me at the time. One, was how happy Greg seemed to be, (by the way he had been given life in prison) and two, at about the same time, my parents were suggesting that I should try Church, but for different reasons. My Father did time in the late 50's early 60's and he said the parole board liked that kind of thing. I figured I'd tried everything else, why not try this Jesus, I knew who he was and what he stood for.

So, I started going to Church and I felt something right away. I always knew it was there; it was God's presence. So, on January 1st 1996, I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into my life and in my Heart and I haven't been the same ever since. I can't say it's been easy, but I have been a lot happier, more joyful, peaceful, and believe it or not, lovable. Since I gave myself to the Lord, God revealed to me, in prayer, that he was with me in all my near death experiences, that there is a purpose for my Life.

I could write pages on each experience and subject, which I just shared with you. The last year has been really hard on me. My Father passed away of cancer and my Mother had to take care of him as the cancer ate away at him, so she is taking it really hard. I feel sorry for her. I feel so alone at times, then I get mad because, "I shouldn't feel this bad because I got Jesus."

God has really helped me turn my life around. I`m just starting to feel like a child of God which I know I am because of the Body and Blood of Christ.

I thank you for letting me share my testimony with you.

This contributor is a member of the South Mountain Friends Fellowship at the MCI at Hagerstown.

Spiritual Journey

by Jean Pfefferkorn

My human spiritual journey has been typical of many others, a looping back and returning to the early themes that fed my spirit.

As a child, my journey began with love. The middle child of a military family, my father was often away on ship, leaving my mother to care for my older brother and younger sister, and me.

Because of the disruptions of my dad's career, we were tight-knit and close, many times each other's default best friend. I loved my family and spent happy hours playing with my siblings.

My father stayed with the military for 20 years, spending time with us as possible. Once, he hitchhiked through a snowstorm from his ship in Norfolk to East Greenwich Rhode Island to see us. He and I became close as we both aged.

My love of nature also emerged early. One memory of a four-year-old me involved grasshoppers in the fields near my home. I enjoyed the multitudes of insects, which I would catch, observe, and put into a jar with a piece of leaf and a stick, covered with a lid with holes poked through. With the suffering and death of some of my beloved friends, I learned to just visit them and leave them be.

My grandparents were devoted to Rockland Methodist Church in Ellicott City, which was a tiny white shingle building when I was a girl. My grandmother taught the ladies' Bible study for 25 years before she retired. While my father was stationed in post-war Japan, we lived with Mom-mom and Pop-pop, and attended church often, stopping on the way to pick up those without transportation. My inner ears can still hear the piano accompanying many wavery old voices singing "The Old Rugged Cross" and other early American hymns. From my grandparents, I learned love of Christ, and of church.

In sixth grade, I was given an understanding while in Methodist Sunday School that set me on my path to become a Quaker. We had been given a workbook for the class which would give us a Bible passage or story, then ask us questions about what we had read.

There was no interest in spiritual experience, and at the age of 11, I understood that the Methodist church didn't have the answers for me. "There's got to be more to religion than this!" I thought. As time passed, I left the Methodists and turned to Quakerism in college, drawn by the emphasis on experienced spirituality and by the peace testimony.

In seventh grade, I lived close enough to a library that my friend Susie and I could reach it by bicycle. Here, I found an appreciation and love for literature, and later discovered that I also enjoyed writing.

My spiritual path has consisted of revisiting these themes. My love of family led me to marry and raise children and extended my family to my neighbors and friends. I believe that after all, we share so much, we are all cousins. Spirituality in nature has led me to a love of horticulture, an interest in environmental issues, and a enjoyment of just being in the woods. My love of books has been immensely helpful as I journey, giving me sustenance and inspiration both when the going was rough or smooth. I have found my spiritual home in my commitment to Quakerism. My focus has shifted to meditation and improving my communication with the Divine, and working to live the testimonies in my everyday life.

It is perhaps true that I will loop back to these sources of spiritual energy for the rest of my life.

Spiritual Commentary

By Richard Sutton

I write this piece on 9/22/09 the first day of Fall. I do love the changing of the seasons. All of creation is a circle. Being born a Melungeon and raised around other Native Americans, I

have always known this. I have studied and observed many people and their beliefs. We are all saying the same thing. We use different words and call the Creator by different names, but it is the same. Mankind invented these different creeds and dogmas, and religious gets between us and the Great Mystery. I do believe the mystics and the convinced followers will prevail in the Spiritual Wars.

I have been serving this prison term since 1974. I have always been a spiritual person and the Creator has never given me a greater burden than I could bear. Some folks choose God, but I do believe that sometimes God chooses people. I know the Creator blessed me as a child and has protected me these many years. I believe in God's time. I will be given the answers of the "how" and "why" of things. For now, I meditate, pray and study, and live as a monk. This is my calling and leading for now. I have been given the wisdom and strong spiritual belief to change myself and mature in my spiritual walk. I am never alone, for the Kingdom of God is within. I live in the Presence and walk on Holy Ground.

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My Spiritual Path

By Bethanne Kashkett

At the risk of sounding like a granola eating, tree hugging, whacked out vegan...I would like to share part of my spiritual path! One way I express my connection to Spirit is by following a vegan diet/lifestyle. I grew up in a very "meat and potatoes" home.

When I was fifteen I attended a summer camp run to simulate a kibbutz in Israel. Each person had a job and you worked every morning. Work ended at

lunch time and the afternoon was filled with attending interest groups and free time.

That first year I was assigned to work in the garden and I attended an interest group on vegetarianism. Midway through the summer, I became an ovo-lacto vegetarian. During the next four summers I went back and worked in the kitchen with the vegetarian cook.

Twenty five years later, I was still an ovo-lacto vegetarian. But I began reading more and more about the life of dairy cows, and factory raised chickens. Battery cages, downed animals and feed-lots became a part of my consciousness. I sensed a new chapter was unfolding.

Like any good leading, I resisted veganism. For one thing, my children and husband are ovo-lacto vegetarians. Our kids, being picky eaters already complicated dinner menu planning. Becoming vegan would make matters even more tedious. For instance, what would I eat on “grilled cheese night” or if we went out for pizza? Still, I continued to read and the truth kept gnawing away at my resistance until one day I just took the plunge. You can’t “un-know” what you now know...I told myself.

Your diet determines what you buy. What you eat gives you at least three chances (most days) to “Let your life Speak.” I wanted my life to speak for compassion, kindness, and peace. I wanted to do my part to protect the environment. I knew there were other ways to get calcium and protein that didn’t support an industry which promotes pain and suffering to sentient beings.

In the book, “The World Peace Diet: Eating for Spiritual Health and Social Harmony”, author Will Tuttle

captures why I became a vegan and why I follow this lifestyle. He writes: “Joining together to pray and visualize world peace is certainly a noble idea, but if we continue to dine on the misery of our fellow beings, we are creating a monumental and ongoing prayer for violence terror and slavery! It is the prayer of our actions and it is the experiential reality of billions of creatures who are at our mercy and to whom we show no mercy.”

I believe passionately in eating food full of color and nutrients. I am as Julia Butterfly Hill wrote: “A joyful vegan!” Focused on the benefits, physically and spiritually of this diet—rather than on what I can’t eat.

Quakers believe that there is “the Light of God in everyone”.

I think the Light of God is in all beings. When I look into the eyes of a cow, pig, cat or dog (I have actually done this!) I see a being connected to Spirit. I see a being who fears pain, and responds to kindness. A being who just wants to live out a peaceful life...just like you and me.

Gandhi once said “the most violent weapon on earth is the table fork.” I’m not sure about that, but I am sure that the last ten years following a vegan diet has helped me strengthen my belief in compassion and peace. After 35 years of following a vegetarian and then a vegan diet, I am certain that what you choose to eat impacts how you feel about your spiritual connection to all sentient beings and the universe.