

Meeting Points

THE MAGAZINE OF MILTON KEYNES QUAKERS



This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Milton Keynes Quaker Meeting. After an initial informal Meeting at the home of Howard and Jennifer Roper, the first formal Meeting for Worship was held at Loughton Memorial Hall on the 16th April 1972 (see picture below). Many of the people at Loughton that day were Friends from neighbouring meetings. Only about six were Friends who actually lived in or near Milton Keynes. Jennifer now stresses that she has always been very aware of and grateful for the support we received in the early years from people from other meetings. At that time, we were an 'allowed meeting' and met every first and third week of the month.



16th April 1972
After the first Meeting for Worship at Loughton Memorial Hall, Milton Keynes



A more recent Meeting for Worship held in Milton Keynes Quaker Centre before the Covid 19 restrictions began in 2020

MK Quakers

50 years

1972-2022

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From the editors

Changes on the editorial team

Encouraged by general support from readers, Rob Paton's energetic enthusiasm was largely responsible for the relaunching of Meeting Points in 2020 after a brief break. Sue Sheldon Davies joined the new team and made a valuable contribution. However, Rob and Sue D are now moving on; we thank them both and are pleased to know that they will continue to write for the magazine from time to time.

Can you help? Sheila Edwards is our newest editor and there are also opportunities for YOU if you would like to share in producing Meeting Points. We would particularly appreciate it if you have the technical skill to take a turn at putting the bi-monthly magazine together in its final stages.

MK Quakers' 50th Anniversary This year is the 50th anniversary of MK Meeting, and throughout the year we hope to include articles related to the growth of our Meeting from 1972 onwards and into the future. Friends may remember the first meeting held 50 years ago in Jennifer and Howard Roper's home and those earliest days when Meetings were held at Loughton Memorial Hall.

Perhaps some of you were involved in the planning/purchase/building of the Meeting House and could write about that. Some may remember key events over the years. Then, of course, we need your thoughts about the future of the Meeting as it moves forward. Please send us your contributions.

Milton Keynes and you We also hope to start a series of articles written by individual Quakers about their contribution to the growth of the successful town of Milton Keynes. See page 7 for details of this: **LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK.**

Contributions and Word Count

Approximate word counts are:

Full page with heading: 570-590

Full page with heading + picture/text box 400-410

Column with heading: 260-270

Column with heading + picture/text 170-180

Contributions can be sent to one of the editors or to mp.miltonkeynes@lquakers.org.uk

The deadline is the first Friday of each month of publication (January, March, May, July, September, November).

Photos and other material Are you a keen amateur photographer or artist? We always welcome relevant photos and drawings, whether your own or sourced elsewhere. Please send your photos or other artwork in, whether of current events linked to the Meeting or more general local pictures that you are proud of. We would like to have a bank of photos and pictures available. We would also be interested in building up a stock of relevant 'filler' material – any quotes, sound bites, jokes, cartoons etc that you think readers would enjoy?

Sue Mouneimné & Sheila Edwards

Wardens' News

Temperamental times

Recently we started maintenance on the wall-mounted hand sanitizers situated throughout the building. They are very temperamental! Open them and the nozzle falls off, the refill cap at the top falls off, the liquid splashes all over you (best to have a bucket underneath) and closing them is quite fiddly. I always wondered why one sees them in other buildings and they are normally empty and with a sanitizer bottle on top - now I know. We have in our building a mixture of bottles and wall-mounted hand sanitizers, feel free to use them at your convenience.

Over the last year, we had a steady income from our hirers returning and some new ones. Unfortunately, with the new Omicron variant, most hirers cancelled, except for the support groups. December is normally quiet, but this year even more so. We are grateful that most hirers are now returning, although some are still hesitant. **(continued on page 4)**

Worship in person, might we kindly ask you to help with stacking back the chairs?

Ending with these words by Mary Oliver seems to be appropriate:

Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

We are looking forward to another year as your wardens. Kevin and Helen

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Lifelines

Talking Quaker sessions were resumed this Autumn after a pause during the pandemic. This time the sessions were in the form of listening groups. Groups of up to eight Friends spent the first half of each session pondering silently on the theme of **Lifelines**. Those who wished to speak during this time contributed only once into the silence. After that, the group changed gear and became a discussion group, responding to previous contributions and reflecting on the topic.

Thoughts on joining my first 'Talking Quaker' session

Camilla Malone

It was my first experience of attending Talking Quaker sessions, three sessions in all, and I was excited and intrigued to see what they were all about. This year's starting point for reflection was Lifelines.



In my group of eight to ten people, some of us spoke of the love and friendship of family and friends as lifelines. Writing up family history as a means of handing down family stories is a way

in which one Friend is creating links with her family's past. Another Friend told of how she writes stories for her grandchildren, a loving way of creating connection with and inspiring her young relatives. A member of the group recommended the book "Becoming Myself: A Psychiatrist's Memoir" by Irvin D Yalom, as he embarks on writing his own memoirs, but with uncertainty at this stage of what he wants to pass on to later generations, and exactly how, knowing he has the chance to create a meaningful and powerful book.



A Friend recalled her experience when, as a small child whose family had just moved towns, an adult took her hand and gave her comfort when she most needed it, in a

time of vulnerability. This prompted reflection on how we can be lifelines to others without even knowing it. This has made me bring to mind over the last few weeks some of the simple acts and gestures that have touched my life.

Sometimes we don't always support ourselves and we need to be reminded to be kinder to ourselves. One Friend described how she had been able to "bring herself consciously in line with her body" that afternoon, by allowing her body to choose the pace for a few hours, instead of powering through as usual. It reminded us that the Quaker way is to use silence in our lives, at times collectively, at times individually, to go beyond our every-day thinking.

Our final session concluded with one of our elders raising the questions "Are we all actually seeking ourselves? Is this why we come to Quakers?" For me, at least, Quakers is my spiritual home and a place for seeking truth, or at least my own truth, a place that helps me to try and live in truth, with integrity. It was a wonderful space to share our experiences and reflections and to get to know each other a little better.

Bletchley Park... and Quakers?

By Sheila Edwards

I'm sometimes asked how, as a Quaker, I view Bletchley Park, wartime home of the codebreakers, where I'm a volunteer tour guide. I enjoy sharing with groups of visitors the thrilling story of how German Enigma codes were cracked in WW2 by a dedicated workforce of over 9,000.



I've met Quakers who see an anomaly - a place of war and a pacifist? The atmosphere at Bletchley Park in the 1940s was very actively in favour of the war effort. It's also true there are ex-military people to be found among today's volunteers and staff at Bletchley Park. And then there is me...

But I've never been entirely alone. I believe there were some Quakers employed at Bletchley Park during the war. It was an acceptable form of non-violent activity, in the same way as logistics or medical work. I expect those Quakers had the same view of Bletchley Park as I do; it was committed to ending the war and the atrocities of Nazism. There were, indeed, some Quakers who left their Meetings and enlisted to fight, rejoining after the war and taking part in rehabilitation work.

I first heard of the wartime presence of Quakers at Bletchley Park through talking to

veterans who came on my tour. They spoke of Quakers and pacifists who had worked quietly amongst their ranks. The word 'quietly' is important. One did not broadcast pacifism in wartime. It was an unpopular stance in the public eye, associated with cowardice. Local people who offered rooms to rent for Bletchley Park employees sometimes specified 'no conscientious objectors'. Any pacifists or conscientious objectors amongst the employees certainly wouldn't have been a vocal group.

I also sometimes noticed, in published obituaries, references to Quaker schools that veterans had attended. Some years back, I set about looking into this, by placing an ad in *The Friend*, seeking information. I made contact with two Quaker families who knew their deceased relative had been employed at Bletchley Park. Unfortunately, nothing was known of their job role or life there.

It's unlikely that any conscientious objectors were employed as Government Code and Cypher School civil servants. Conscientious objectors had to be registered and appear before a Tribunal, and there is no evidence that Bletchley Park recruited its 'mainstream' staff through those Tribunals. It is considered very possible, however, that there were conscientious objectors in medical or welfare roles on site and in outposts.

I'm unlikely ever to unearth a 'treasure trove' of information on this subject - but one never knows! Long-lost diaries secreted away by veteran workers do come to light many years later when their grandchildren explore the attic.

If any local Friends know of Quaker wartime connections with Bletchley Park, I would be interested to hear. I hope, also, those Friends who take advantage of the

complimentary tickets to Bletchley Park enjoy their days there! It's a unique place of history, computer genius and stories of human endeavour.

Sheila Edwards

LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK

The editors hope this will be just the first of a series of articles about Quakers and Milton Keynes. Let us know if you yourself have had connections to the development of Milton Keynes and whether you think your Quaker values influenced your work in any way. Many areas of interest spring to mind: the planning of Milton Keynes and its development, the successful business economy, local politics, culture, sculpture and artwork, the concrete cows, the Open University, policing, schools, churches, the hospital, social work, counselling, the library, the parks and Redways, the establishment of a Quaker Meeting, etc., etc.

Perhaps you achieved your ideal and perhaps you didn't. In either case, we would love to know your thoughts.

Please send your contribution to one of the editors, or to:

mp.miltonkeynes@11quakers.org.uk

Approximate word counts for your guidance are:

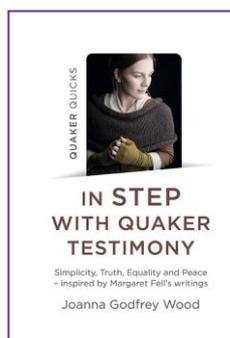
One column with heading only: 260-270

One page with heading only: 570-590

Deduct words to allow for pictures, which are also most welcome.

Library: Recent Acquisitions

Quaker Quicks are short books each of which gives an accessible introduction to one aspect of Quaker tradition. We have added the two latest editions of *Quaker Quicks* to our collection, which is on display on the top shelf, next to Section 1.



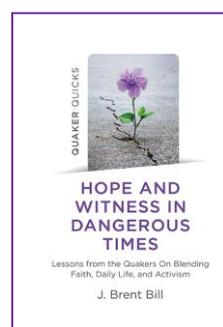
In Step with Quaker Testimony

by **Joanna Godfrey Wood**

Margaret Fell was an inspiring and practical leader in the early Quaker movement in 17th-century England. Remembered as the wife of George Fox, her writings have been largely forgotten. This book brings them to life again, with excerpts and reflections structured around the four testimonies that have continued to shape Quaker witness to this day: Simplicity, Truth, Equality and Peace. To do this, Joanna Godfrey Wood follows each passage with a modern adaptation of Fell's words and then explores her own personal responses from a 21st-century perspective.

John Hunt Publishing

Classification: 3/WOO



Hope and Witness in Dangerous Times

by **J. Brent Hill**

This book invites all people of faith to consider how our personal and communal faith practices in growing deeper spirituality should bring us to a fresh engagement with the needs of this world. This includes being active in promoting those values which align with our understanding of the gospel and standing against injustice, oppression, and evil inflicted on any of God's children.

John Hunt Publishing

Classification: 3/HIL

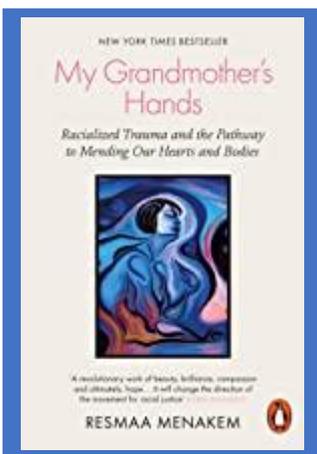
Book Review

written by Carmel Schmid

My Grandmother's Hands

by R Menakem

This book contains a rude awakening for those who consider themselves progressive, liberal



or equalitarian with regards to race. That probably includes the entire Quaker community and so, yes, this book is relevant.

The premise is that we each (Black/White or Police) have inherited an element of trauma that subconsciously

contributes to ongoing 'White Supremacy' in the world. Without this awareness, we may believe that we are sympathetic to the cause and at the very least harmless.

Initially, the book explores the complexity of current day 'white supremacy'. The author explains why white police officers are not held to account for black deaths in service. He says that officers carry the trauma (and fear) in their bodies and their cognitive response is overruled by adrenaline-fuelled action. Liberal or progressive white people react in a similar way and our 'progressiveness' thwarts rather than helps progress. This concept was demonstrated in a movie called "Crash" where the good cop was the one who opened fire on an innocent black kid.

Having said that, I have a 'love hate' relationship with this book. Yes, some excellent content, ratified by highly acclaimed trauma practitioners. But, I am dubious about much and especially the concept that everyone's trauma relates to race inequality.

Despite my appearance, as a fair Caucasian, in the context of this book - I feel more black than white. By that I mean that I feel unempowered. My felt sense of being radically dis-empowered has been with me all my life but the origin (childhood trauma) only dawned on me slowly over recent years. My condition is 'Complex PTSD'. And so, the concept, that all white people need to address inherited 'white supremacy' leaves me cold.

I do think it probable that we all carry trauma wounds of one kind or another, and for many - the trauma is inherited. I agree too that we all need recovery from our wounding as trauma wounds do create havoc in the world.

This book goes on to offer practical suggestions of addressing trauma somatically (meaning deep-seated wounds held within the body). I would have preferred these to be contained in a separate work-book because, for me, a one-off exercise is of little use. I am unlikely to return to this book to find the exercises which need to become embedded into a daily practice. Having said that, there are myriad therapeutic practices available elsewhere that address trauma at a physical level.

This book covers many aspects of racial issues, trauma and recovery. It is heavy-going but thought-provoking and informative.

Carmel Schmidt

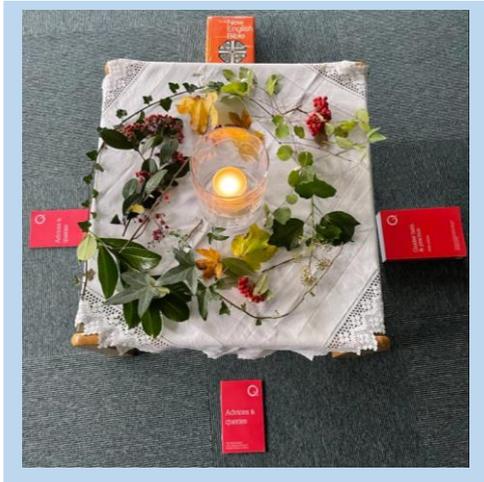
This book is available in our library: classification 10/MEN

"History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history. If we pretend otherwise, we are literally criminals."

James Baldwin

Interpreted by love

The introduction given to the Winter Retreat by Maggie Cook



The idea for this theme, *Interpreted by Love*, is taken from the popular English hymn *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind* by John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) – often known as the Quaker hymn because its author was a 19th century American Quaker poet (and leading anti-slavery campaigner).

Some of you will have heard me say that I think two of the lines in Verse 3 are among the most beautiful and significant in the entire English hymnal:

O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee
The silence of eternity
Interpreted by love!

It was into this type of setting that Jesus would come and pray when he withdrew from the crowds that he was mostly surrounded by – into “the silence of eternity, interpreted by love!”

For me, this metaphor sums up so much: first of all, the unfathomable mystery at the heart of human experience (‘the silence of eternity’). In other words, however we try to dress it up, dress up our beliefs, or try to articulate them or pronounce them, we still cannot know the truth. The reality is that we

live in a state of unknowing ... and some people find it hard to accept that. Nevertheless, what **is** within our power is the possibility of choice, the choice of **how** we interpret that unknowingness. The poet is suggesting that, for Jesus, what made sense of it all was a philosophy of love, and clearly, from what we know of his life, he manifested that. The interpretation through love can be our choice as well – to have love as our main guiding principle. This is not only a massive act of faith, it is also a guide as to how to live, a guide as to which choices to make throughout life, a guide that continually offers us the possibility of choice.

Of course, the essence of the whole Christian religion in its origins is love – love of neighbour and equally, I believe, love of ourselves, or at the very least kindly acceptance of ourselves – although Christianity has never been so good at that bit. On the contrary, Christianity as a movement has formally and doctrinally taught us to dislike and devalue ourselves particularly through the doctrine of original sin which believes there is something essentially ‘bad’ about us, that we were born with this particular contamination passed on from Adam. As a result, we are: ‘like worms’; we ‘proceed from evil to evil’ (Jeremiah 9, 3); we are ‘in the chains of wickedness’ (Acts 8, 23).

And just a glance at an old hymn book reminds us that ‘I nothing am’ (343) I am ‘an obdurate stone’ (348) ‘weak and vile’ (351) ‘polluted’ (352) ‘one dark blot’ (353). My history is ‘sin upon sin’ (354). I have ‘some cursed thing unknown’ which ‘must surely lurk within’ (364) ‘dust and ashes is my name’ (365). I have a ‘foul heart’ (366) and all of us together are ‘a vile and thankless race’ (63).

These are predominantly 18th and 19th century versions of St Augustine’s doctrine of original sin. He wrote in the 4th century CE ‘We have all become one lump of clay, that is, a lump of sin we as sinners deserve nothing other than eternal damnation’. And a few years after

that he uses the phrase '*original sin*' for the first time in the history of Christian thought.

For Augustine, original sin was passed on genetically from Adam to all subsequent human beings; all descendants of Adam were condemned to hell from the time of their birth for a sin they committed before they were even born. Essentially, that sin is the result of a lust for the sexual act beyond what is necessary for procreation. This teaching became official church dogma in the year 529 CE. What Christianity taught, alongside this notion, was that only Christ's sacrifice could save us from this original sin, the sacrifice of a redeemer suffering and dying for all of mankind.

If you've ever read St Augustine's autobiography, *The Confessions*, you will know that, from the vantage point of modern psychology, his doctrine of original sin represents what we might call a huge 'projection' onto others of his own experience. In its early chapters, it is essentially a pretty racy story of Augustine's own hedonism, particularly his single-minded pursuit of sexual pleasures. It was around the age of 16 he gave up studying altogether and concentrated on chasing females for sexual satisfaction.

I suspect that, even if we feel we have not been particularly influenced by Roman Catholic doctrine, there is something deeply pervasive about these ideas which have been current in Western thought for about 1700 years, culminating in a kind of self-hatred and self-rejection, an unworthiness, that appears to have become the norm, even if only at an unconscious level. So, to bring it right up to date, how else would social media have become so powerful if it wasn't meeting, coalescing with, something that was already there, already embedded? Of course, in the past twenty years, the widespread use of social media has shone a light on and exacerbated these levels of self-hatred and self-rejection.

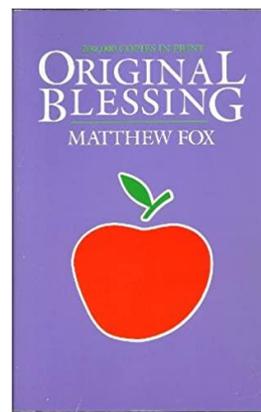
It has become a common theme in social media leading to considerable levels of depression and anxiety, especially in the

young, who find themselves rejected (and particularly self-rejecting) because of their body image or because of something in their personality and attitude which gets attacked by someone else - often anonymously.

Supermodel Bella Hadid recently spoke out about her mental health 'rollercoaster' of 'breakdowns and burnouts' as a result of the impact of social media. In January she took a break from social media activities - from that rollercoaster - in order to try and focus on improving her mental health. And Adele's latest album includes a new song 'Hold On' in which she says '*Right now I truly hate being me*'.

We can barely imagine what a difference it might make if the common message were - instead of such fundamental self-rejection - *Advices & Queries* No. 22: '*You are unique, precious, a child of God*'

It is probably only in the past 50 years or so that voices with this different message have started to be heard. Much of this may occur in the private and intimate world of therapy, where people acknowledge and mourn their



loneliness and self-rejection, but there are increasingly more public messages which proclaim this very different story. I suppose one of the most famous - and controversial - was the publication of *Original Blessing* by Matthew Fox, which

first came out nearly 40 years ago and was subsequently named by the *New Age Journal* as one of the '20 books that changed the world'. Matthew Fox fundamentally challenged the age-old Christian doctrine that we are mired in original sin. At the time, he was a Dominican monk, and also a priest in the Roman Catholic Church.

I believe I'm right in saying that, of the world's major religions, only Christianity holds to a doctrine of original sin. Ideas are

powerful and the fact that many Christians believe there is something in human nature that is, and will always be, contrary to God, I've heard described as 'not just a problem but a tragedy'.

In his book Matthew Fox lays out a whole new direction for Christianity—a direction that is ancient and grounded in Jewish thinking. Fox believes that the teaching of original sin, which Jesus never heard of, of course, (no Jew has), has served empire-builders very well, but that original blessing, being the awareness of the goodness of creation, must take precedence. The implications are profound for psychological as well as sociological and ecological transformation.

The sacredness of creation and of our role in it is the starting point—what the mystical tradition calls the Via Positiva, the path of joy and delight, awe and gratitude. For Fox, all of us are mystics and all of us are prophets, and he shows how Christianity once celebrated beauty, compassion, justice, and creativity and provided a path of ecstatic connection with all creation. *"Original blessing means realizing your sin is not the most important thing about you, even if the world – or the church – makes you feel like it is".* (John E Toews: Canadian historian)

The doctrine of original blessing also acknowledges that the deepest level of our human nature is designed to hear God's voice and walk in God's way. Another way of saying that is that our 'centre of gravity' is original blessing.

Of course, Matthew Fox paid the price for so publicly going against the Church's teaching. In the year following the publication of *Original Blessing*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger — the future Pope Benedict XVI, then head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith — asked the Dominican Order to investigate Fox's writings. When three Dominican theologians examined his works and did not find his books heretical, Ratzinger ordered a second review (which in fact was never undertaken).

Due to his questioning of the doctrine of [original sin](#), in 1988 Ratzinger forbade Fox from teaching or lecturing for a year. Fox wrote a "Pastoral Letter to Cardinal Ratzinger and the Whole Church," calling the Catholic Church a dysfunctional family and, after that year, Fox resumed writing, teaching, and lecturing. Three years later, in 1991, his Dominican superior ordered him to leave the Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality which he'd founded in 1976 in California and return to Chicago or face dismissal. Fox refused.

Two years after that, in 1993, Fox's conflicts with Catholic authorities climaxed with his expulsion from the Dominican Order for "disobedience," effectively ending his professional relationship with the Church and his teaching at its universities.

Among the issues Ratzinger objected to was his feminist theology; calling God "Mother;" preferring the concept of Original Blessing over Original Sin; not condemning homosexual behaviour; and teaching the four paths of creation spirituality: Via Positiva, Via Negativa, Via Creativa, and Via Transformativa — instead of the Church's classical three paths of purgation, illumination and union.

It was not long after that, in 1994, that Matthew Fox was received into the Episcopal Church (Anglican Communion) as a priest by Bishop William Swing of the Episcopal Diocese of California.

Since then, a number of Catholic priests and theologians have preached a much more positive view of human nature, among them Fr Richard Rohr, an American Franciscan priest who offers a daily online meditation that a number of Friends in our Meeting follow.

Only last month, Richard Rohr wrote: *From the very beginning, faith, hope, and love are planted deep within our nature—indeed they are our very nature* (Romans 5:5; 8:14–17). *The Christian life is simply a matter of becoming who we already are* (1 John 3:1–2; 2 Peter 1:3–4). But we have to awaken, allow, and advance this core identity

by saying a conscious yes to it and drawing upon it as a reliable and Absolute Source.

One theologian, Paul Knitter, who has made an extensive study of Christianity and Buddhism, writes: *'The underlying reason why people keep causing themselves and others so much suffering... is because we are ignorant about who and what we really are. Our problem is not an inherent sinfulness but an inherited ignorance... But - and here is the really good news - if ignorance is our fundamental problem, we are dealing with a fixable problem. This problem is not within us as part of our human nature. Rather, it's around us... The antidote for the ignorance that causes suffering is to wake up to what we really are.'*

So, what are we really? ... Following especially Tibetan and Zen teachings, we can say that our true nature, our real nature, is Buddha-nature. What some Western theologians and psychologists call 'the true self' or 'the Christ self'.

Once we wake up to our Buddha-nature, once we realize the Space in which and out of which we live and move and have our being, then nothing, no matter how much it hurts or disappoints or frustrates, can destroy the strength of our inner Peace, of our ability both to endure and to respond to whatever happens.'

Richard Rohr continues: *'Much of the early work of contemplation is discovering a way to observe ourselves from a compassionate and non-judgmental distance until we can eventually live more and more of our lives from this calm inner awareness and acceptance.'*

Lisa Frost calls this *'living your deepest yes'*. *'Deep within, at your very core, there is a voice. This voice is the guiding wisdom that we all have access to. When you clarify and attune to that place inside, you gain access to that voice - learning first how to listen and then speak and act from it.'*

When your heart, body, mind and soul are aligned, you experience a profound sense of rightness all the way down. This is your truth. The truth about who you are, what you want and why you're here. This truth is the very thing that has been guiding your quest for authenticity, purpose and meaning. When you touch this truth, you experience it like a tuning fork sounding from the

core of your being that reverberates out to dynamically interact with life. We call this truth your "Deepest Yes".'

Tara Brach, a psychologist and Buddhist meditation teacher, says: *'For decades a prayer has circulated in the background of my daily life: May I trust my own goodness. May I see the goodness in others.'*

Increasingly over the years, my trust in this loving awareness as the essence of who we all are has become a guiding light. No matter how wrong or lacking we may feel, how caught in separation, or how trapped by the messages, violations, and inequities of the society we live in, this basic goodness remains the essence of our Being.'

She continues: *"Remember the Jewish proverb: Before every person there marches an angel proclaiming, 'Behold, the image of God.'"*

'Trusting your own goodness'

So, I would like to invite you to reflect on 'trusting your own goodness' and feel what that must be like, especially for those who don't naturally go to that place. What could change for you if you really did that? If you made space for truly loving and accepting yourself? If you allowed yourself to love others more generously? I invite you to take part in this experiment and to write down anything that might be different in your life if this were the case. We'll have about twenty or so minutes doing this in a private and reflective way and then we'll come back together. The idea of this is that it is anonymous so please don't put your name on it. What I'm going to suggest is a process we've done before - that we fold up our anonymous pieces of writing, we'll pass them round and someone else in the group will read it out - also anonymously. That way, we can pool our collective insights and experiences before we then move into meeting for worship.

Responses to Maggie's request are on the next three pages.

'Trusting your own goodness'

Responses to Maggie's invitation at the Winter Retreat to reflect on 'Trusting your own goodness' and to feel what that must be like

If I was able to trust my own goodness, two things would happen: (1) The times I feel deep shame for something I have said or done would be less frequent and (2) when they occur, each shame episode would last for a shorter time.

The result of this would be that I lived more of my life as 'authentically me'. This acceptance would result in an increase of the longing & energy in me to be a more compassionate person in the world.

What would change for me is no longer being tortured by guilty memories of things I have thought, said or done in the past, or not thought, not said or not done in the past. The past includes the recent past.

As a child I always believed inside me that I was essentially 'a good human being'. I could do 'bad' things, like pinch my sister when she was selfish or said horrible things to me but I didn't think that made me 'a bad person'. I went to a Church of England primary school and attended Church services where the vicar and the ritual of the liturgy informed me I had been born bad which is why Jesus's death would save me. I couldn't get my head around this aged five. I still can't grasp it and if I was the head of the worldwide Anglican church, I'd require every Christian to embrace a philosophy of self-acceptance. Love starts inside ourselves; I knew that when I was a child. I have told myself this, every day, ever since for almost 65 years. Nothing sums this up better than Advices & Queries 22: 'Each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.' This is what changed for me. Quakers (and therapy) enabled me to see and believe there is a 'via alternativa'.

Trusting my own goodness:

My heart is full of longing and love. Where it leads, I follow.

My tender heart is cautious of being hurt rejected not being good enough.

I trust my heart to lead me to places of community, compassion and connectivity that feed my life.

There I will calmly stay in a place of trust.

I can imagine a deep sense of ease and relaxation penetrating my whole being if I could always be aware of the innate goodness of myself and others.

What a relief it would be.

What a joyful life I would lead.

And what a wonderful world it would be if everyone did this.

Just be who I am and love that soul which is often hidden but which shines depending on the fog and open skies within us.

My soul is my temple.

To be open with greater acceptance and to be able to value the richness of that person and others too.

To really learn how to listen – really really listen with undivided attention.

To be able to unwrap years of embedded filters that have inhibited openness.

To live in the moment and to feel strong in my action of kindness.

If I could live and breathe into my deepest yes

I'd have so much more energy, vitality, space, to offer myself and others.

I'd have more moments of peacefulness when I could feel my 'deepest YES', MY deepest YES. My DEEPEST Yes. My deepest YES. YES.

My belly relaxes, my mouth smiles, my eye begins a twinkle, my gaze softens, my back releases, my chest opens, my ribs widen.

I could **truly** listen; I could remember those things which are important and which help me make connection, deepen relationship.

I could truly engage in self-compassion so that I could forgive myself for things I so wish I had done differently and I imagine that I will continue to be able to forgive myself in the future.

I could accept what I can offer. I am good enough.

I am good enough. I **will** be good enough. I **was** good enough.

I could forgive myself as a parent, as a moulder of beings, as a creator, as a human being.

I could feel the breeze, the oh so slight breeze, the wings of the angel makes as she walks in front of me on each person I meet along the way.



The challenge is how to find my essential goodness beneath the hardening of decades of conditioning.

My goodness feels at the moment like a gawky fluffy fledgling. It needs the warmth of the smile of kindness from last night to melt and soften the defences. Then I will be able to find and recognise the goodness in others.

What do I believe?

(positive) in people.

(negative) in God, in original sin.

Very deep down - very early stuff in my life - is a sense that I am 'in the way', that I am some sort of 'unwanted intrusion'. This feeling still persists despite years of consciously engaging with my own emotional growth. It still stops me doing certain things, e.g., visiting a sick friend, because something tells me - with conviction - that they won't want to see **me**, that I will be an intrusion and that, at best, they will be polite. So I hold back. If I trusted my own goodness, I think I would be more relaxed, I'd be generally sunnier - not so intense. I recognise this is a deep and early wound that is hard to shift.

I would trust that I could serve others as they need to be helped.

I would be less judgemental

Less afraid of what others think and feel about me.

Have more confidence in myself.

Feel more secure less anxious.

I would feel freer to express myself more openly.

And be at peace

What could it be like to trust your own goodness more and be more generous loving others?

Less guilt

More confidence

Less critical of others

Take things less personally

Fewer hang-ups

A spiritual lightness

Could trust my own judgement more

I could be less controlling.



What would be different?

I would fear criticism and rejection less.

I wouldn't have to try so hard; I would have nothing to prove.

I would react less, and respond more lovingly.

I would not be stung by my own mistakes; I would smile at myself more.

I would be more at ease saying 'no'.

I would be more open so I might feel more pain but it would trouble me less; it would pass.

I would trust more.

If I valued my own goodness more, saw it/me as more beautiful and precious, I would prioritise spending time daily to experience and get in touch with my centre I'd ignore/let go the many, many distractions which seem, and possibly are, important and certainly urgent.

Experiencing the love at my centre never has a deadline. Almost everything else does. Seeing the goodness in others more readily would mean me slowing down, being more patient, accepting and less anxious.

Other thoughts: The struggles St Augustine had to bring his own sexuality into line with the anti-sex strand in Christianity has had a very toxic legacy. Nonetheless, whatever language is used, the 'shadow side' is real. Human nature is a very mixed bag.

Every day I aim to be a better person than the day before.

Each day I seek to learn something new in order to be a better person, a more whole person.

When I look back and see how far I've come, I amaze myself and am full of gratitude for the great teachers, authors, researchers, spiritual speakers who pass on their knowledge.

With this knowledge, and practising it in my daily life, I can forgive my foolish ways, 'my absurdities and blunders' (Ralph Waldo Emerson) which were based on ignorance, and move towards a more whole me, where all parts of me (light and dark) can be understood and accepted and I can live according to my truth and in integrity.

I am learning to be me, the best me, inching forwards.

I am learning to be a better person in this world.

*We are given one blessing: love, which cannot be taken away from us.
Only love, and all the joys will be yours, the sky, the trees, people, and
even yourself.*

Leo Tolstoy

St Francis and the sow

The bud
stands for all things,
even for those things that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on the brow
of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;
as Saint Francis
put his hand on the creased forehead
of the sow, and told her in words and in touch
blessings of the earth on the sow, and the sow
began remembering all down her thick length,
from the earthen snout all the way
through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,
from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine
down through the great broken heart
to the blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering
from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking
and blowing beneath them:
(remembering) the long, perfect loveliness of sow.



Galway Kinnell (1927–2014)

This poem was read out at the 2021 Winter Retreat, which had the theme *Interpreted by Love* (See pages 9-15).

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Contributions welcome!