

Universalist Friends

The Journal Of The Quaker Universalist Fellowship

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The Quaker Universalist Fellowship is an informal gathering of persons who cherish the spirit of universality that has always been intrinsic to the Quaker faith. We acknowledge and respect the diverse spiritual experience of those within our own meetings as well as of the human family worldwide; we are enriched by our conversation with all who search sincerely. Our mission includes publishing and providing speakers and opportunities for fellowship at regional and national Quaker gatherings.

Universalist Friends and a QUF pamphlet are published twice a year and are available free to on-line subscribers. These publications are available as web pages (HTML) for browsing, ebooks (PDF) for on-line reading, and pamphlets (booked PDF) for printing. Visit our website at <http://www.universalistfriends.org> to enter a free on-line subscription.

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A Message From The Clerk

We Are in This Together

We are all on a human journey as a global community. Within that community, we learn from each other. We learn from our friends. We learn little from those we define as “enemies” or “other.”

The key is: who are our friends? What is the scope of friendship in our spiritual journeys? Spiritual friendship is a community without borders of religion, nationality, gender or race. The broader the scope of our openness to friendship, the more learning happens.

We are a group, a people, a mix. We are united in the idea that universalism is at the heart of our journeys in the tradition of Quaker faith, of Christian faith, of Jewish faith, of the primordial faith in which we have the cousins Islam and Buddhism and others we only barely know but of which we are learning in that spiritual friendship. We are all together on this journey. We are all universalists to some degree. We are all increasingly universalists to a high degree.

The assistance of Buddhist analysis is offered toward our understanding of Quaker worship. We all need any help we can get. I help you and you help me on our common spiritual journey. In this issue, John Cowan offers “You Are the Light!” as possible assistance for Quakers in understanding their faith and practice of worship from the perspective of Buddhist experience. This is one example of mutual help and it can be an example of learning.

There are consequences to universalism. Universalism is a powerful dimension of reality. We recognize there are consequences to universalist views for practical tolerance, appreciation and understanding of other religious traditions and individual journeys. We recognize that our growing

universalism involves reassessment of the ways in which we have formulated both our faith and practice on our spiritual journeys.

The common human search for truth in our world embraces both science and tradition. New understanding of our world, from global warming to cosmic distance and behavioral genes requires reassessment of our spiritual practice and understanding. The miracles of George Fox in the book review of *George Fox's 'Book of Miracles'* (2000) in this issue points to that process of reassessment. The challenge of economic crisis provides the occasion for rethinking our faith in our economic decisions and actions as the other book review of J. Powelson, *The Quaker Economist: Global Issues of Concern to Quakers* (2002) offers.

It is a good journey. There may be stresses as we stretch to understand the assistance of other friends on our spiritual journeys. But the gifts far outweigh the pain.

Larry Spears

News And Announcements From Quf

New Editor and Plan for Pamphlets

The pamphlets published by QUF have a new editor and will have a change in schedule. George Amoss has volunteered to edit our pamphlets, while Rhoda Gilman will continue as editor of *Universalist Friends*. Before the change to online publication, a pamphlet was mailed twice a year with each issue of the journal/newsletter, thus saving both postage and labor. More recently, we have been alternating them, with issues of *Universalist Friends* appearing winter and summer and pamphlets in the spring and fall. Henceforth, pamphlets will appear on an irregular schedule, whenever excellent material is available. In part this decision was reached in view of our hope to publish more books like Readers Number 2 and 3.

Universalist Friends will continue to appear in February and August on the web site and in the mailboxes of those who subscribe to a hard copy. Questions, comments, and submissions of articles and book reviews may be sent either to <editors@universalistfriends.org> or to <rhodagilman@earthlink.net>. Longer essays (ca. 6,000 to 8,000 words) may go to the first address or to George Amoss at <g_amoss@yahoo.com>.

Report from QUIP

The QUF has been a member of Quakers United in Publishing since the founding of QUIP. This year the international organization's annual meeting was held at Twin Rocks Friends Camp, near George Fox University in Oregon. Steering Committee member Lyn Cope represented QUF there. She writes:

Those who attended were a vibrant bunch, seemingly all very glad to be able to participate in this year's powerful

gathering of approximately thirty Friends representing the Quaker theological spectrum. The QUIP Youth Book Editorial Board, also from around the world, met concurrently in another lodge. . .

The location on the Pacific coast is stunning and those of us from the east coast were the first to volunteer for morning kitchen detail. Working together provided a great time for social discourse, and from my point of view, QUIP meetings uniquely emphasize shared values, promote the written word — all details regarding publishing — and certainly total acceptance of one another's theology. Business sessions and workshops filled Friday and Saturday.

The highlights for me were the Saturday afternoon and evening talks by Marge Abbott and Peggy Senger Parsons. The stately image of Marge contrasted with Pastor Peggy's flowing black hair and motorcycle boots as they entertained and educated us on their upcoming project: a book about understanding, accepting, similarities, and respect. . . Marge's background is Pacific Yearly Meeting and Peggy is pastor of Freedom Friends Church.

The QUIP Conference in 2010 will be held in Richmond, Indiana, in conjunction with a writers workshop. In 2012, QUIP will meet at Woodbrooke, in the UK.

Announcement and Invitation — the Parliament of World Religions

A Friend from Melbourne, Australia, who reads our web site has sent the following message about the PWR, which will meet in Melbourne, December 3-9, 2009:

Greetings. The Parliament of World Religions had its origins in Chicago in 1893. Since 1983 four modern

Parliaments have been held, the last in Barcelona, Spain, in 2004. Melbourne will host the fifth. I am one of fifty representatives of local faith communities, and my role is to disseminate information, to assist and to be a contact point for local, interstate and overseas Friends.

The theme of this year's PWR is: "Make a World of Difference: Hearing Each Other; Healing the Earth". The website is www.parliamentofreligions.org. Ten thousand people, local and international guests, are expected to attend, and major speakers include: Laurence Freeman, Director of The World Community for Christian Meditation; His Holiness the Dalai Lama; Chief Oren Lyons, Native American Faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation - USA; Professor Joy Murphy Wandin, Senior Aboriginal Woman of the Wurundjeri People, Victoria; and Rabbi David Rosen, Chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations. As part of this rich interfaith discussion, participants will address social cohesion and critical issues facing the global community.

Some of you may wish to participate in some way, such as registering for full or part attendance in December, volunteering at any time before the Parliament or during, or taking part in free events. A homestay program will be organised later on in the year. The organisers are considering the 1,500 program submissions which have been received. I and other local Quakers would love to know if you plan to attend. Do contact me on any PWR matter.

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In Memory

The QUF is sad to announce the death of Susan Norris Rose, the wife of our steering committee member and publisher, Jim Rose. Susan herself served on the steering committee for a number of years until her retirement in 2007. Born in Pittsburgh in 1938, Susan held degrees from Cornell and Johns Hopkins universities. She was a historian and scholar and the mother of two sons. An active Friend, she was instrumental in founding two meetings, one in Howard County, Maryland, and later one in the prison at Hagerstown.

Friends who are interested in a picture book of Susan's life can find this at <http://www.patapscofriends.com/archive/Reports/PictureBook.pdf>

You Are The Light!

Buddhist Theory Applied to Quaker Worship

By John Cowan

Quaker Worship tends to be described poetically without a rigorous analysis of the internal process. Throughout the history of the Quakers words have been used to describe this experience such as “the light,” or “the seed,” or “the teacher.” This describes the experience poetically. This is how it feels. However such words provide little guidance as to what to do other than on a general level. That is, sit and wait. Even the idea of “hold yourself in the light” leaves the hearer in the world of example. What does it mean in fact? Can the experience be taken apart and placed before us step by step as these steps relate to the ordinary processes of the ordinary person?

Buddhist process, while radically different from Quaker worship in its expectations (a snapshot of reality versus a creative flow), has been described in detail.

The Buddha was a spiritual engineer. He and some of his followers experienced “awakening.” That, too, is poetic analogy which describes what the experience must have felt like. But they did not leave it at that. As they sat in meditation they paid attention to the internal process and described it in some detail.

Perhaps the attempt to carry learnings from Buddhism to Quakerism will deepen and ease Worship. This must be done with caution. Buddhist meditation and Quaker Worship are not the same thing. Meditation focuses on what is experienced now, with no other concerns. Worship implies the existence of some greater force overcoming the worshiper, instructing him or her, and leading him or her to instruct others and to work for the greater good. The sense that we are governed

by a greater power that is in the process of creation is a Judeo-Christian concept. However, with care, perhaps we can discover a similarity in the experience indicated by the Buddhist words and the Quaker words and have a window into the worship process that will make it more easily teachable and more readily learnable.

As I sit quietly, I am aware. When we are acting most of us lack any sense of our own existence. We focus on the task. But if we can for some extended period be without a task, we have the possibility of becoming aware of simply being. "Awareness" comes to the foreground. Most find awareness uncomfortable since not only the pleasant but also the painful rises into the radar. To avoid awareness of death, destitution, severed relationships, my own mean-spirited acts and other such, the mind leaps for something to do. Even then, we can be aware of whatever it is that the mind is doing, but it is difficult. We tend to get sucked into the whirlpool of activity. For example: for a moment I was quiet and aware of my own existence, but then I began to daydream, and for a moment I was aware that I was daydreaming, but then I was just daydreaming without any awareness at all. But for a moment I was aware, so I know I can be.

And with practice I find that I can become aware of where my mind has gone and then in a pause I can become aware of my own being.

I am aware that the most fundamental description of who I am is that I am this awareness. Who am I? I cannot be the activity, for it passes. What is it that remains from activity to activity and exists even in the pauses? Neither intention, nor thought, nor feeling, nor memory, nor a body cell remains constant. "Awareness" is the continuing fact. Most fundamentally that is I.

The early Quakers did not say this. The question as to what was their fundamental identity in this swirling process was neither answered nor asked. This is a Buddhist insight. The

Buddhist distinguishes the “self” — name, form, body, feelings, thoughts, mental objects — from the “awareness” and answers the question “Who am I?” with “awareness.” If the Quaker founders had tried to make this distinction they would have identified with the “self” and would have called the awareness the Teacher, or the Christ, or the Light. The major step in applying Buddhism to Quakerism is to identify who I am as the awareness.

I am aware that this capacity goes beyond the material. That this Light is derived from God is a serious claim. It assumes that there is something greater than ourselves that is working through us. Those who have felt the profound surge of the Spirit of God will unabashedly claim that whatever this is that has swept over them, it is not their will that they are following but the will of a greater power.

It is divine, and it is I. I am awareness: still, quiet, at peace. As a Light within all the whirling structure I mistake for myself, this divine I observes, and loves. Am I, then, divine? I am unsure. In the continuity of the experience somewhere the divine must end and the human must begin. But where is that? Our ancestors in Quakerism were taken over by the force of this Light. Were they divine? They did not claim that. Somewhere the power to ignore the Light remains ours, so we must be human. But if we surrender completely? A puzzle! Perhaps this complete surrender is what prompted the community of the Gospel of John to regard Jesus as both God and man. Paul says: “Christ was made obedient, even to death, even to death on a cross. For that reason God has exalted him...”

Note that the light is a loving awareness. Instead of thinking of ourselves as broken human beings we see ourselves in a process of development and not perfect but loveable. We do not expect babies to do calculus and we do not expect ourselves to be without blemish. We love calculus-deprived babies and sinful selves.

George Fox seems to be aware of this when he counsels that when imperfections are revealed the Quaker not focus on them but look beyond them to the Light itself. Isaac Penington, counsels that rather than being crushed by sin the Quaker be lifted with the realization that the Light has the power to remove the sin

My self surrenders to the Light. The Light explores my body: sensations such as pain or warmth, or perceptions such as color, shape, or sound. The Light explores my feelings: such as attraction, aversion, ignoring. The Light explores my thoughts such as planning, remembering, daydreaming. The Light explores my images of a world outside of my body, people and things. In worship I surrender my “self” to the Light. In worship this awareness cannot be directed to specific objects. Once I begin the process of deciding what I am to be aware of, I am no longer simple awareness and I have not surrendered to the Light. My one care during worship is to allow the Light to explore what arises. Sometimes much of a period of worship will seem to yield little fruit. Yet, even the silliest of topics can lead to depth. If something remains in awareness it is unwise to attempt control, yanking self to more pious thoughts. Allow the silly to be explored.

For instance: Someone enters the meeting room late and noisy. I am annoyed. This annoyance is a silly thought arising and blocking my attention to important matters. But since it refuses to pass, let me look at it closely. The late person has offended my values. The question arises: How is it that I expect my values to be shared by the universe? (Interesting line of inquiry. Perhaps images of other examples of my rigidity will arise.) What is this person’s problem that they cannot show up on time as I do? (Another interesting line of inquiry. Maybe they have some things happening in their life that makes timeliness very difficult.) Who am I to be judging others? Where is my compassion? Suddenly I have moved from the trivial to the depths, and without having to redirect my focus, just allowing the next thing to flow forward.

After some practice in this process the Spirit of God seems to move us through the intervening steps between the trivial and the cataclysmic more quickly and more often.

This divine searching highlights desire and its companion, anxiety. This is in some ways a Buddhist thought, not a Quaker thought. But with different phrasing it is a Jesus thought. Easy to see that the restlessness of anxiety gets in the way and muddles my perceptions of reality. But anytime I want something I experience anxiety, since my world is by the very fact of wanting incomplete. The Buddha told his followers that therefore they should not want anything. Jesus said to want only your daily bread. This is why he said that those who had chosen poverty were blessed.

Armed with this fact, during worship I am alert to which of these wandering thoughts and feelings are motivated by desire, and which of my recurring sufferings are arising from wanting what I cannot have. For example: My spouse has died and I am torn apart because she is no longer with me. My problem is: I want what I cannot have. That does not mean I force myself to stop feeling what I most humanly am feeling. But it does mean that I am aware of the nature of my pain. The Light becomes the divine compassion holding me in its healing touch, and understanding that the healing must come in time from surrender of that which I now want oh so terribly.

Worship is the sacrifice of my self to the power of the Light. Worship is openness to being overcome by this Light, allowing it to play on the objects of my awareness and openness to the insights and demands that arise from this process of illumination. It is also a willingness to testify to these insights and demands to others and accept their testimonies as objects demanding my awareness. At its deepest, Quaker worship is a profound bow to God, not a distant God in Heaven, or a God once seen in Jesus or scripture, or a representation of God in a statue, painting, or on a cross, but a bow to the God waiting to take over my senses, thoughts, will and behavior.

As Jacob Boehm, the German cobbler and a spiritual source for the seekers of George Fox's era, said: "When you stop willing and thinking 'self' then the eternal hearing, seeing and speaking will be revealed within you, and God will see and hear through you."

Worship suffuses life outside the meeting room. Peace arises as I walk in the world because I am the Light that is awareness. That which I hold in the Light becomes more sharply defined and brilliantly colored. The complex becomes simple. The demands become obvious. The difficult becomes easy. I begin to approach and therefore understand the power of the old Quakers, and the power of Jesus of Nazareth. I realize that I too am "a light that has come into the world." George Fox became a different man the day he heard that there was one who could save him and he surrendered to the Light. So can we. The Buddhist says that the difference is that between being asleep and being awake.

My Friends and I are called to illuminate the world. Worship is a communal act. The light in me illuminates for me the words of my Friends in worship. My words, indeed my very presence, provoke the Light in them. We build on one another during the service. And we are called as individuals and as a community to testify to this Light and what it has shown us by both our words and actions.

Dialogue

Reader: What is the difference between being aware of the Light and being aware?

Writer: "Being aware" can refer to the simple act of noticing life around me. I am aware of a tree, or a feeling, or a thought or a person. So let's use that as our first description of awareness.

"Being aware of the Light" is being aware of my deepest self which is the awareness itself irrespective of what I am aware

of. So while aware of the tree I can be aware of that which is being aware. These are not two separate things. There is not an “I” that is aware of awareness, but the “I” and the awareness are the same. I am awareness. My name and form, thoughts, feelings, body are not my deepest being. My deepest being is the awareness.

(Was it Einstein who said: “Either nothing is a miracle or everything is a miracle.” Accepting the Light as divine is of a piece with accepting everything as a miracle.)

Reader: The vast majority of good and faithful people – Friends, Buddhists or otherwise – will spend their lives stumbling along just like you and I, seeing at best only occasional glimpses of any grand mystical enlightenment. Maybe not even that. I think that enlightenment should never be mentioned without also mentioning this messy and inescapable humanness.

Despite this reservation I appreciate you and all those who call our attention to these higher possibilities. It is something to keep an eye on. In the end, though, I find that simple human kindness is more important than enlightenment.

Writer: I hate to disagree with you because you are one of the kindest people I know and your kindness has often been to my advantage. But I disagree. The approach of being virtuous without focus on inner awakening is risky. The danger looks like this: Since I have been taught that kindness is better and I want to be better (a prompting of the subtle “self”), when facing the fact that my “self” prefers self-indulgence I attempt to put the temptation out of my mind and act kindly instead, perhaps in the hope of eternal life, perhaps in the hope of becoming a weighty Friend, or perhaps in the hope of assuaging my conscience. This creates a struggle that goes on forever.

The process of regarding both the indulgent “self” and the prompting to kindness with simple loving awareness creates no struggle and over time creates change easily. They both just rest in the Light and then they do what they do. No pushing from me. George Fox said that all you can do is bring it to the

Christ, and then the Christ will create the change. What prevents this process from doing what it can do is very few people try it, including Quakers.

Since many of them slipped into this state without great difficulty, our founders thought the transformation of humanity immediately possible. Apparently they were wrong. However, I will not settle for less. There is some conversation among Friends now as to whether or not we have settled for less. And I would say settling for kindness only, without allowing the Light to disperse my internal darkness, is settling for less. Then we become a church like any other. They create nice people. I did not become a Quaker to be nice. If that is all there is, give me a church with better music and more money.

Reader: My question is really a complaint that deals with the practical effects of awareness. You claim that as worship suffuses the life outside of meeting ... “the complex becomes simple. The demands become obvious. The difficult becomes easy.”

My experience is that it is as accurate to say that the simple becomes complex, the demands become confusing, the easy becomes difficult. For example, as I am willing to look at my mother’s fears and social phobias as the reason for her withdrawal from relationships, I can no longer luxuriate in anger but am left feeling saddened and aware that I need to love her as is, without hope for emotional honesty and closeness. As I become aware, I wonder if the reason my daughter and I are not as close as I’d like is because I rarely pick up the phone and call her, that I’ve been expecting her to reach out to me.

So I think it needs to be said that awareness doesn’t necessarily result in a curve of lessening personal pain. I do have some hope, though, that my awareness does diminish the harm I do to others.

Writer: Ah, but awareness does result in a curve of lessening personal pain. You just have to allow the awareness to go further. In the case of your mother, be aware of how your

desire that it be different causes you to suffer. Do not try to change that, but allow the Light of God to illumine your desire and the resulting suffering. Over time I would expect the desire and the suffering to lessen and extinguish. You will not continue to do what is hurtful to yourself.

If you allow your awareness to really welcome the fact that you could call your daughter, and allow yourself to be aware of why you do not, (perhaps because you are angry that she will not call you) I suspect that the Light will make you aware that the best course for you is to call her and you will. Perhaps begrudgingly at first, but be aware of that and it too will slip away as another painful and unnecessary block to your happiness. (Some Quaker somewhere in suggesting that some other Quaker go out of his way to heal a breach said: "Of some, more is required." You may be the one in these relationships of which more is required.) Note here that as a Quaker it is expected that you not simply observe, but recognize what is a call to action. Off hand, this would seem to be that.

Reader: I think you're right. As I become open to truth/reality/the light I first experience pain (although it's some kind of pain that directs my attention in the first place ... right?) As my awareness grows I see a bigger picture of the issue and a path to relieve my suffering. This path may involve empathy, recognizing unreasonable expectations, more effort or initiative, walking away ... whatever. The skill that I'm developing is to work the process more effectively ... to learn to get from pain to awareness in a given situation more quickly with fewer dead ends and collateral damage.

I'll call my daughter today.

Writer: You are a beautiful woman.

Reader: My overall response to your desire to overlay Buddhist theory onto Quaker worship is this: In order to gain instruction and learn more about how to engage in Quaker worship, we must be willing to draw on Quaker principles, not Buddhist ones.

Sometimes that requires a deeper reading of early texts. Other times it means pressing our fellow worshipers who seem to be living from a Quaker “gestalt” to put our experience as modern Friends into words. And still other times, it means turning to more contemporary writings of “unhyphenated” Quakers (as opposed to Buddhist Quakers, Jewish Quakers, etc), such as Lloyd Lee Wilson or Bill and Fran Taber. Even blog-writers are grappling with some of these questions about blending faith traditions because the perception (not the reality) is that there are gaps in describing Quakerism.

The desire to reach beyond Quaker texts and beyond Quaker principles (and Quakerism certainly encompasses an early/primitive form of Christianity), I believe is the result of the in-creeping of the secular world in our worship and in our discernment practices.

I recommend these texts:

- *Four Doors to Meeting for Worship*, by William Taber
- *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order*, by Lloyd Lee Wilson
- *Gospel Order*, by Sandra Cronk

Writer: The meeting you and I attend is about ten per cent birthright Quakers. The rest of us are hyphenated whether or not we wish to be. And some of us on the journey got several hyphens added to our religious self-descriptions.

I see two approaches to belonging to a religion. One is to enter it as a complete home bringing no furniture, intending to follow all and any of its tenets and directions. (Which on an unconscious level will never happen.) Another approach is to look the new digs over and decide what furniture you will retain from your past, what furniture should remain in the new home, and what will be replaced. The first approach assures minimal change in the religion and risks falling into mindless rigidity. The second approach risks losing the genius of the original but assures ongoing development in the religion and in the person.

I follow George Fox who preferred the second, throwing

tons of furniture out the door and installing his own principle which primarily was a disregard for religious customs, norms, and tenets and casting one's lot with the breath of the Spirit (as did Jesus). Compared to Fox I have inserted little furniture and so far I am unaware of removing any.

I am not applying Buddhist principles abstractly to Quakerism. I discovered in Buddhism and in the Veda the fact that in my deepest reality I am awareness. Now I come into the Society of Friends, and as I look into my being for the "Light" the Quaker should live in, the most obvious bulb seems to be that awareness. From that everything else in this paper flows.

I doubt that I am influenced by the secular world in this. I am influenced by dozens of remarkable writers delving deeply into their religious traditions.

Reader: Hmm, "more poetic than analytical ..." Do you suppose that the nature of God is more like poetry — we draw on lyrical language rather than analysis when we speak of the Living Presence and how we open ourselves to the Light?

Writer: Sure, poetry is in some ways as close as one can come. Read the Sufi poets for some great understandings. The problem with poetry is that while describing sky diving as "flying through the air as a bird" makes great advertisement copy an analytical look at the process that includes the fact that this bird is wearing a parachute will prove invaluable to the learning process.

Reader: I am without blushing a hyphenated Buddhist-Quaker. More than that, I am a Quaker Universalist — but that calls for no hyphen.

Quakerism and Buddhism are practices, not belief systems nor answers, but they help us to stay on the inner path of compassion and seeking. The observations and insights of George Fox and other 17th century Friends are valuable guides, but looking to them for a definition of Quakerism today will not serve. The spiritual landscape they saw was vastly different from the one that faces us.

The same is true for the Buddhist sutras. Buddhist teachers need to apply the insight of impermanence to their own teachings, and there is evidence that many are doing so, not only in the West, but also throughout the world. In the 21st century both Buddhism and Quakerism will be what we make of them — with study, practice, and devotion as profound as humans have ever been called to.

Both East and West have subtle threads of mysticism which whisper that the yearning in our hearts for meaning must have an answer and is a guide to action. This is our best chance of finding the common ground from which to meet and survive the spiritual crisis that overwhelms us. Only mysticism can unite us without controversy, because its very essence is in not-knowing and never-knowing, but in feeling our kinship for each other and for the world of time and living organisms.

All spiritual traditions have shown, somewhere in their teachings, an impulse toward this kinship, and that fact in itself is a sign. I firmly believe that Quakerism and Buddhism, each from their particular strengths, are pointing the way toward the essential (and I hope inevitable!) universalism that we need for survival.

Writer: Why not end on this note? With the following caveat: I regret seeing both Buddhists and Quakers leaving traditional tenets because something other is more comfortable. Normally that means the other is carried over blindly from some earlier and therefore easier place. I appreciate my readers on both sides of this “move on” issue. The last reader for getting us off the dime. And two of the earlier readers for insisting we stick with the Quaker path as is. I am in favor of diligently working our way forward. It is the human thing to do, if history is a guide.

Book Reviews

Quakers and the New Story: Essays on Science and Spirituality, by Philip Clayton and Mary Coelho (27 p. 2007)
Reviewed by Richard O. Fuller

This booklet was first published on paper by the New Story Study Group, members of Friends Meeting at Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is now available online from Quaker Earthcare Witness, at <http://www.quakerearthcare.org/Publications/index.htm>. Philip Clayton is a philosopher and theologian and a widely published author; Mary Coelho wrote *Awakening Universe, Emerging Personhood: The Power of Contemplation in an Evolving Universe* and coordinated the New Story Study Group (of six). She has contributed two lovely illustrations to the booklet. Four other glorious color illustrations by Angela Manno make it very inviting. And “inviting” it is.

There is a two-page invitational introduction and overview by Philip Clayton followed by an engaging first-person narrative by Mary Coelho, offering her own life as an example of the transformation the Study Group hopes may come to many Friends. She writes: “I realized the unitive life is no longer contradicted by science! . . . The experience was also one of falling in love, in the sense of wanting to be intimately related to that which I had known.”

The next sections are a graceful skimming of a century of scientific thinking on several fronts. They cover research in subatomic particles and the evolution of the universe from before “The Great Flaring Forth” (big bang) on through the emergence of life on earth. The authors say they are “panENtheists,” claiming Quakers Thomas Kelly, Elizabeth Watson, Douglas Steere, Howard Thurman, Rufus Jones and John Woolman to be in the panentheistic tradition. For my summary here I will use the single word “plenum” to stand for

a cluster of concepts developed by several thinkers over the decades. The authors of *Quakers and the New Story* prefer this word to the many alternatives. The plenum or void or implicate order or seamlessness or pleroma is the place where material reality comes from. (You might also say “God,” and some do.)

When physicists look at subatomic particles with those big supercolliders, the “things” they are studying were *not* “things” in the nanoseconds before they were observed. These “things” condensed out of a field of *probable particles* into that specifically observed particle in response to the observation process itself. Physicists say the field of potential “collapsed” into a particular observation. Not only is this process still a mystery to physicists; they also admit that the field that preceded the appearance of the “thing” has characteristics they can posit. The Cambridge New Story Study Group uses the word “plenum” to refer to this underlying, nonmaterial source of all, in which we live and move and have our being.

Ever since Einstein’s theory of relativity began to be transformed by our growing understanding of quantum physics, some physicists have recognized that we are not living in a world composed only of measurable matter and energy. Atoms are not little things. And the speed of light does not limit how fast events happen. Early respected doubters of a strictly materialist reality within the ranks of physics were Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg and Edwin Schrodinger. The most articulate advocate among the physicists for an invisible reality was David Bohm, who published a challenge to the old ways of thinking in 1952. In the following decades there have been many such thinkers and within certain scientific circles their thinking is now commonplace. Gary Zukav and Brian Swimme were among those who brought these ideas to the lay imagination in the 1980s. I have been following this thinking with wonder over the years, aware that something profoundly significant was happening to our assumptions, but not until *Quakers and the New Story* has the significance of this shift

reached me at an emotional level, and, for me, that is its major contribution.

This booklet was written for Quakers, trying to address a centuries-old wound, or split, between how we in the West think about science and how we think about the world of the spirit. The authors say:

The group has . . . been concerned that science has a great deal of authority in the West and has often inappropriately denied many religious insights and hopes. It is the changes in science itself — such that this denial can no longer be sustained — that we have been pondering and celebrating. The New Story now gives much of Quaker tradition a vast, largely receptive home and offers a context for further explorations of its tradition.

But this assertion is not their main point. They offer a conceptual healing that is profound: We have grown up with divided thinking but we no longer need to carry that. The New Story is a story of wholeness, dear Friends. And what would that mean, if we felt at home in the universe? If we looked at the galaxies revealed by the Hubble telescope and thought, “Aw, that beautiful star-stuff, it’s like me!” If we resonated with the intricate transient perfection of a blossom and recognized we were stirred because we are kin. The bud’s centric unfolding is not just a chance parallel to our own development; the flower is doing the same things we are, in it’s own way. Or, conversely, your own fragile life beautifully carries and expresses the same sturdy life-force that is in all nature. Each life is a journey manifesting the spiritual world:

While the New Story is a large, comprehensive story, it is also deeply personal. The revelations concerning the indwelling plenum, the person as a form of the earth, the nature of matter and the ongoing evolution of the earth are a source of confidence in the central place of the person

in the unfolding story. It is the whole person, comprising the invisible{?} and the plenum, form and nothingness, who is an integral part of the evolutionary story. . . . ‘Be ye whole, even as your Father in Heaven is whole.’ (Matthew 5:48)

But we can say these words and still have trouble maintaining the intellectual-emotional integrity that is the promise of a vision uniting our spirituality with the science we learned as young people.

Western culture is so permeated with fragmentation and loneliness it is difficult to comprehend how the person, with his or her unique individuality and consciousness is at the same time fully part of, or within, the unfolding story. . . . To grasp the radical changes in human self-understanding offered us, it is important to understand the manner in which distinct forms, as the atom, the cell, and the human person, are formed in the process referred to as self-organizing. An example of form generation is the whirlpool in the ocean; the whirlpool is a distinct form yet it is also a form of the ocean itself and remains intimately related to the ocean. . . . although it may have gained great complexity and semi-independence, [it] *still remains integral to the whole*.

Likewise a fish. Likewise, a sailor.

The authors of *Quakers and the New Story* urge us to let our actions be guided by this understanding. They quote Isaac Pennington: “There is that near you which will guide you; Oh wait for it, and be sure ye keep to it.” They note that “David Bohm placed the origins of consciousness in the . . . [plenum/God]. Realizing that the plenum is the ground of consciousness, we can understand that the images that form in our minds are manifestations of the [plenum].” They quote Thomas Kelly, calling us to the plenum: “Let us explore together the secret of

a deeper devotion, a more subterranean sanctuary of the soul, where the Light Within never fades, but burns, a perpetual Flame, where the wells of living water of divine revelation rise up continuously, day by day and hour by hour, steady and transfiguring.”

One form this rising up takes, for Quakers, is leadings. The Study Group says, in effect: Friends, look to the plenum. Friends, an experienced meditator, working in community, can trust the plenum for guidance. Your leadings are a gift from the universe, an expression of its essential nature. The plenum, expressing itself in the incarnate universe, is trying to go somewhere, and you are part of the story. Listen up, and act, according to your best lights! “We may enter into union with, or become resonant with, the powerful dynamic, creative, unifying ground that is the foundation of our being. . . . ‘Living in the Light.’” This all goes back to George Fox, and the many who responded to his call. Rex Ambler freshly presents the call to us again, and hundreds of Quakers regularly gather healing information from the plenum, in his “Experiments with Light.”

At an extreme, we give of ourselves as in the Jesus story, in an act of joy, of communion. Not all members of the Cambridge New Story Group are animated by the Christian story, but the New Story is profoundly compatible with such a life. One member wrote: “what is hard to understand is the Passion . . . we see it in the life of Jesus. There, in the life of this majestic and humble figure... pain and suffering [may] seem separate from joy and exaltation. But the joining of suffering and joy must have been the experience of Jesus in those last days.”

The authors conclude:

As persons who are Earth-beings, forms of the earth, we can gradually break down our exploitive relationship with the earth and our widespread, deep alienation from the

earth and other human groups. The Friends Meeting at Cambridge study group finds hope in having recognized that there is an amazing ‘fit’ between Quakerism and the New Story. To us, it seems that the usual five testimonies of Friends—simplicity, peace, equality, integrity and community—can now be even more deeply understood in the context of an ecological worldview and an unfolding, new universe story. . . . Quakers, together with many others, are called to be a part of the urgently needed evolution of consciousness which is now offered to us in this most unique, critical time in the earth’s story.

The New Story provides a place for maintaining and valuing diversity and seemingly paradoxical opposites while working within an integrated vision that preserves and fosters the viability of the unfolding whole.

George Fox’s ‘Book of Miracles’, edited by Henry J. Cadbury (2000)

Reviewed by Larry Spears

Miracles are events that defy our current knowledge of the laws of nature. What were “miracles” in the context of 17th century knowledge would not be considered “miracles” in the 21st century, because knowledge of natural processes and human interventions have changed. Miracles are subject to a moving credibility standard as knowledge increases.

Today, the Roman Catholic part of the Christian tradition has a near institutional monopoly on identifying and defending miracles. Generally, Roman Catholic leaders have sought to maintain rising minimal standards for the credibility of asserted miracles in order to approximate scientific knowledge. The Pentecostal tradition still includes assertions of regular healing miracles, but with less attention to rigorous standards for their credibility. The remainder of the Christian tradition is discretely

silent in identifying events as miracles.

Objectively, the prayer experience of the whole Christian community, including Quakers, is dominated by requests for miracles. Most Americans, including Quakers, want to believe in miracles occurring in their lives and in the lives of their acquaintances, but they are increasingly skeptical about miracle claims outside their circle of acquaintances and interest.

The book reviewed here describes what remains as a generally unseen dimension of the ministry of George Fox for modern readers — his miracles. Edited by famous Quaker scholar, Henry Cadbury, *George Fox's 'Book of Miracles'* is one of the cleverist detective works in Quaker history, producing a reconstruction of a now lost manuscript by George Fox, which apparently described the miracles attributed to Fox during his ministry. A founder of the Quaker movement, Fox believed that miracles of healing through his own words, prayer, and touch were performed by God. These miracles constituted a significant part of his ministry, charisma and power in the lives of people transformed by the Quaker message.

This re-publication includes an extensive introduction by Henry Cadbury describing how he reconstructed the lost Fox manuscript from a detailed index he found in an obscure archive and compiled and supplemented from other Fox writings. The book also includes three separate forewords by Rufus Jones, James Pym and Paul Anderson, all of whom are variously ambivalent about the reality and meaning of miracles in general and about the truth and right interpretation of the Fox miracles in particular.

The Jones introduction provides a historical and theological context for understanding what “miracle” meant in the 17th century, leaving open our modern interpretation of these facts. Anderson provides a detailed analysis of the themes of the book, and Pym offers a defense of miracles then and now, based on his experience with parapsychology.

Together, these commentators present the issue of miracles in our lives in a thoughtful way for meeting discussion and individual reflection. They occupy more text than the reconstruction of the *Book of Miracles* itself. The volume includes a good index.

It is hard to put this book down. The several forewords are valiant efforts to create a credible space for miracles in human life in some form. The book forces us to clarify the role of miracles in our current understanding and how we respond to assertions of miracles in conversation and the role of miracles requested in our prayer lives.

This republication, with the new forewords, is a joint publication of Friends General Conference (FGC) and Quaker Home Service (QHS-Britain) under the leadership of Quakers Uniting in Publications (QUIP), an association of Quaker publishers seeking to serve Quakers better with publications. The book is available at FGC (<http://www.quakerbooks.org/HenryCadbury>).

Standing in the Light: My Life as a Pantheist, by Sharman Apt Russell (306 p. Basic Books. 2008)
Reviewed by Lois Yellowthunder

Pantheism is “The doctrine or belief that God is not a personality... belief that God is everything and everything is God (*Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*, World Publishing Company, 1966, College Edition). The concept of pantheism forms the umbrella under which Sharman Apt Russell explores the essence of her own spiritual beliefs as well as her interpretation of various philosophers, poets and religious thinkers who are considered by some to be pantheists.

The book is a complex braid of brief biographical sketches, personal history – religious and secular – and experience with nature in the form of bird banding along the Gila River in New Mexico. (The book begins and ends with cranes.) Threaded

through this narrative is the author's experience with the Religious Society of Friends and Quaker meetings. The result is more a journal than a tapestry. It is difficult to engage with the whole, since each chapter is broken up into the aforementioned components. There is an excellent "Selected References and Notes" section at the end of the book.

Sharman Russell's journey is reflective of a growing sensibility in the 21st century among a segment of the population that seeks a greater congruence with the natural world, their lifestyle and their spiritual beliefs and practices. In many ways, this is an honest book. Russell describes her very real aversion to the poverty of the developing world as she experienced it on a month's visit to Guatemala. She also recoils from the fear and violence that predominates there. Though she brings her account to a poetic conclusion, one senses she has not found a single great light illuminating the darkness:

It sounds good on paper. Me and the earth. Me and the animals. Me and the sun and moon and stars. But when I am in a bad mood, pantheism feels more like unrequited love, the dreary task of whipping up both sides of a relationship. The truth is that I often feel lonely. I am talking to myself and no one answers.

The most interesting part of the book is her effort to integrate her changing image of the Divine into her experiences with the complexity and challenge of life in the 21st century. She has moved away from a personal God to a more diffuse sense of the Divine. She identifies with the uncertainty of Walt Whitman, the spiritual reflections of Marcus Aurelius and the simple lifestyle of Spinoza. She returns to her Quaker Meeting. She continues her work with birds in between her college teaching and moving back and forth from city to country. This is somehow connected to her growing experience with the natural world – hence her attraction to a diffuse set of beliefs collected under the rubric of pantheism.

It will be interesting as we move deeper into the millennium to see how these concepts will continue to evolve and be actualized in our lives. We look forward in the future, as well, to a scholarly and critical treatment of this evolving synthesis of multi-cultural religious beliefs and practices.

The Quaker Economist: Global Issues of Concern to Quakers,
by J.Powelson (2000)
Reviewed by Larry Spears

How Quakers approach economic issues is more important to the thinking of youth and adults today than in times of apparent plenty. Where do you find a wise perspective from sophisticated economics with deep Quaker values? One source is this book by Jack Powelson. Everyone needs to understand economics. We are a global economy. The future is a single economy around the world in which we all need to understand together the common reality, even as it affects individuals differently.

In the anger and bitterness over the economy gone sour with feelings of deception and misrepresentation, Quakers, like other folk, seek understanding within their tradition. Like sexual health, economics remains among a sensitive group of issues, about which parents are uncertain and, therefore, are reluctant to discuss with their young people. This book provides a resource for continuing conversations with youth about current news reports in the context of Quaker tradition.

High school students wonder about how to make sense of the global economic mess and the underlying dynamics. Parents need perspective in which to explain daily changes to students. In this book, Quakers have a thoughtful resource that does not involve circling the wagons, going into hibernation or retreating back to the earth.

Quaker Jack Powelson was a high level economist with an international perspective. With an economics PhD from Harvard, he worked at the International Monetary Fund and spent thirty years lecturing internationally. In the accumulated forty-eight public letters in this book, he has addressed many difficult global and local economic issues.

Topics addressed in this book include global warming, environment, corporations, international finance, homelessness, trust, torture, globalization, drug wars, poverty, classical liberalism, Quaker attitudes toward business, living wage, and corporate accountability. These lively essays in letter form will delight and support Quaker reflection, conversations and advocacy.

Jack Powelson has also used the medium of thoughtful email letters delivered to a growing audience. After his death this year, his work of bringing Quaker values to sophisticated and practical economic analysis has been continued by editor Loren Cobb and a supervisory board of Quakers and economists. Their *Quaker Economist* newsletter can be accessed at <http://tqe.quaker.org>.

Poetry

Quaker Music (unprogrammed)

I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness
and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love,
which flowed over the ocean of darkness.
In that also I saw the infinite love of God,
and I had great openings.....George Fox

Walk with me to the Quaker music.
Neither choir nor hymnal nor tongue is needed—

just the slow pace to be in such grace
that we hear leaves applaud the blind wind
brailling the shape of each face
to find the Deeper Name.

Wait with me on the meetinghouse bench.
Rest here in the hour as we face silent faces—

eyes closed and with ears still
untuned in our ungathered ring.
Now listen.
Listen ever so gradually

as the Name is uncovered in quieting tones
timed with the evening of breathing

around the heart beating
and the faint path to the foggy shore
opening still more,
as we're drawn inside the Permanent Name

leaving the forms that shuffle and fret,
drawn where the cymbal's clanging

and the brass's sounding fade
with each limping silhouette,
drawn where the Burst-Through
makes room for itself to happen—

opening weary ocean walls
to the drowning darkness,

piercing this thick sea of sorrow
and drawing us deeper into a breathing,
buoyant Ocean of Light,
and where now, All draws through us—

the sounds we've longed to hear,
the Name rising through us

in calling tones to release, to belong—
All gathers through us—
the music of shadows,
the Music of Light.

Robert L. Pugh

Autumn Leaves

Nature in her choice
Of gorgeous hues,
States, "All reds, greens or tans
Must **not** be of the
Same, same class or kind.
Thus are enabled
To blend, bow and match
One another!

In fact, they *must* as well
Frequently rebel and *clash!*”

This pattern and approach
Gives us leave,
Sans the confines of lands or seas,
To float upon
The universal waves of open air —
Which puff and blow
Within the arc above
Which holds our name of *heaven*.

Here, is our home of spirit,
Where our souls can freely
Float, hover, roam and swirl
Above the gift of earth
Bringing into our lives and living,
Mundaneness and confusion,
As we struggle with challenges
To live our lives by
The universal *Golden Rule*
Of our inborn divinity.

So it is
With all humanity!
Let us then enjoy
It all, first,
From the gentle puffs of air
To the full blown hurricanes
Of chance and opportunity,
To live with, then,
Peace, and
Love for one another.

Sally Rickerman
October 31, 2008

The mission of The Quaker Universalist Fellowship is to foster the understanding that within everyone is a directly accessible spiritual light that can lead people to equality, simplicity, justice, compassion and peace.

QUF Steering Committee, November 2005

SUBMISSIONS

We are seeking articles from 500 to 3,000 words. These may be essays on personal experience of arrival or maturation in Quaker universalism or of worship or they may be scholarly works focused on Quaker universalism, history, biography, sociology, scripture, and theology, both Christian and non-Christian. We also welcome book reviews, poetry, personal essays, and letters. Use inclusive language. Please send your submissions by U.S. mail on diskette or CD in WORD to Rhoda Gilman, 513 Superior St., St. Paul, MN 55102 or as WORD attachments to email to rhodagilman@earthlink.net. Please put UF in the subject line. We do not accept anonymous submissions without *very good reason*. **Deadline for next issue: December 15.**

Universalist Friends

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Quaker Universalist Fellowship