

Contemplative Fire Post

June 2018 – no.31



Sat 14th July – Waltham Place Fellowship Picnic



Contemplative Fire Companions, Friends and our wider Community are invited to join in a day of simple fellowship in the beautiful Waltham Place biodynamic garden. The day together will start at 10am and finish at 3pm, with plenty of time to share and chat.

**Waltham Place, Church Hill, White Waltham,
Berkshire SL6 3JH walthamplace.com**

Please bring a picnic lunch and suitable clothes and shoes for a silent contemplative walk together, which will form part of the day.

To book, contact info@contemplativefire.co.uk

Way beyond Religion Leading my first evening

Carrie Williams writes:

Not naturally being the type to put myself forward, I felt quite reticent about leading a session. I could choose any topic but expressing my gifts and passions was suggested. With encouragement and support from the group, and plenty of time to prepare, the reticence changed to nervousness!

My head filled with ideas which led mostly up blind alleys, but a few good ideas stuck. My passion is my art work which is my focus, my daily practice, my sustenance and private to

me. In the previous session we had looked at John O'Donohue's poem, "*The special gift you bring*". The line that had a special meaning for me was:

"No gift is ever given for your private use."

Having been very happy beavering away at home with little or no interruption and certainly no thought of sharing my work, I was quite taken aback. After some thought, I felt my WBR session would be an ideal opportunity to lift the lid on my art work.

As the day arrived, I hoped that my session would be thought provoking and of interest. I introduced a recording from Radio 4 Four Thought series about Maya Youssef. Maya is a Syrian refugee and professional musician who plays the qanun, a 78-stringed plucked zither. She has performed all over the world and is the winner of the Exceptional Talent award which enabled her to migrate to the UK in early 2012. When the war started in her homeland in 2011, she decided that making music was no longer a choice - it was a crucial means to express and come to terms with intense feelings of loss and sadness from seeing her people suffer and her land destroyed. She described her discovery and use of the healing power of music with great effect - it is clearly her gift and passion. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b090293d>



We spent some time in discussion before breaking for our meal. This is a great stress reliever for anyone not familiar with addressing groups and also exceptionally scrummy in our case. After the meal and more relaxed, I revealed my art work piece by piece with a short explanation, which seemed inadequate compared to the attachment and importance they held for me. It's difficult to describe the intensity of the creativity that carves out of thin air something that reveals the passion from

within. However I have a very supportive and knowledgeable group so, with an atmosphere of encouragement and a feeling of confidence, I continued with some quotes chosen loosely for their connection with art, creativity and spirituality. We took it in turns to read one with a pause for thought after each. Finally we lit our candles to *“Take Me To The Alley”* by Gregory Porter.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qj5z4SbrH20>



On reflection of my first session I felt a huge sense of fulfilment and joy, because I had shared my gift of creativity and passion for art and it had been appreciated. I think the last word has to go to John O’Donohue:

“One of the most beautiful gifts in the world is the gift of encouragement. When someone encourages you, that person helps you over a threshold you might otherwise never have crossed on your own.”

“Flame Dancing Spirit”

Flame Dancing Spirit,
 Come sweep us off our feet and dance us
 through our days.
 Surprise us with your rhythms;
 dare us to try new steps,
 explore new patterns and new partnerships.
 Release us from old routines
 to swing in abandoned joy and fearful
 adventure.
 And in the intervals,
 rest us in your Still Centre.
 Amen.

Anne Lewin

Meeting of CF North, Tuesday 20 March

14 Companions and Friends met together with the title *“The Banquet of our Whole Selves”*, a reflective prayer exercise which Jacky brought from the Whirlow Spiritual Growth and Transformation Course as a reminder to

ourselves of how completely we are loved by God, including the parts of which we are often ashamed. We spent half an hour with the exercise, and then had a brief time of sharing our feelings about doing it.

We then turned our thoughts to the ongoing life of our community, given that the current Trio, Jane J, Di and Valerie all plan to step down in August. We recognised that we all have a responsibility to make things happen, both in very practical terms (sending out emails, booking venues, leading gatherings etc), and also in terms of honouring the roots of Contemplative Fire, as started in growth by Philip and others.

We recognised that we may all value CF for different reasons – language was mentioned as something very distinctive from Philip, and body prayer, and of course chanting, as well as Pilgrimages to Now/Here, Threes and Way Beyond Religion Groups. All of these things happen here in the North for which we are very grateful, and we agreed that we want to see everything grow and develop and flourish in the future. And we mustn’t lose our “edginess”.

As a visual metaphor of the value of all of us using what we have and who we are to achieve all of this, Jacky had brought a “maypole” (a broomstick with many coloured ribbons attached to the top), and she held it aloft as everyone formed a circle around it, held a ribbon, and did a dance around it which wove a lovely pattern of ribbons around the central pole. It was pointed out though that it needed someone to hold the pole...



It seems that we have some things to ponder here. It may well be that another three people step up as a Trio, but we also need to blend in this weaving together of all of our gifts, however humble or small we may feel (thinking back to the prayer exercise). This could, for example, mean that the Trio “hold the reins” while other individuals do distinctive tasks or take responsibility for Pilgrimages or small groups. We will discuss this again before

August, but the invitation to everyone is to consider:

- what you might be able to offer, either in practical terms or visionary or theological or pastoral terms
- what you most value/enjoy/are passionate about as regards CF.

May we all travel light and dwell deep together.

Welcome to new Friends of Contemplative Fire

A very warm welcome to 3 new Friends:

- Judith Greenall, Sheffield
- Andrew Myers, Sheffield
- Rev John Stride, Sheffield

Tom Hinds and Malcolm Peet are now Friends



Between

*God is in the 'and' of you and me.
Not you, not me; but you and me.*

*Do not think of a static God:
there is no static God;
only action and reaction,
activity and response,
movement and relationship,
the ceaseless flow
between you and me,
the interplay in which
all cohere.*

*Do not think of a changeless God:
there is no changeless God.
Without change, there is no movement;
without movement, no relationship;
without relationship, no God.*

*The only constancy
is the constancy of change;
the moving out of all to all,
the flow and flux between;
for in the going between
is the movement of relationship,
in that movement
there is God.*

Richard Skinner (in "Colliding with God")

John Philip Newell

"I love the way poets and teachers from other spiritual traditions often throw light on our Christian mysteries like Christmas and Easter. The Muslim poet, Rumi, does this repeatedly for me. 'The body is like Mary,' he says, 'and each of us has a Christ inside. Who is not in labour, holy labour? Every creature is. Yes, God needs to be born, birth from a song breathing life into this world. The body is like Mary, and each of us, each one of us, has a Christ within'.

This, of course, is a Christmas image, but Rumi appears to know intuitively that all of our central mysteries are interwoven. That is one of the reasons why I so love to save my Christmas tree branches and burn them in the Easter fire. The Christ within the womb of our being is the Christ within the tomb of our lives and world. As Rumi says, 'Spring is Christ, raising martyred plants from their shrouds'. This Spring force is the Resurrection force deep in the body of the earth. It is deep also in each of us, longing to come forth as surely as new life from the ground." www.heartbeatjourney.org



Contemplative Fire

Day Pilgrimage in the Hambleton Valley Sunday 19th August 2018



Please do join us for a Day Pilgrimage in the beautiful Hambleton Valley. This will be a day for walking, chatting, sharing stillness and enjoying a lovely South Buckinghamshire valley with its picturesque villages and ancient churches. Total walking distance of just over 8 miles (all flat, one stile morning and afternoon) with the option for placing cars at our lunchtime destination and driving on return for those who would like a shorter walk. Pace will be gentle throughout.

Inspired by Tony Mealing's love of pilgrimage

and encouragement of this practice within Contemplative Fire, we have planned a day for Companions, Friends and anyone else who would like to join us. The day will take us from our start point near Mill End, along the Hambleden Valley to our lunchtime destination at the church of St Mary's Turville. We will then return along the same route, stopping for highly recommended 'Church Teas' and exploration of the church at St Mary's Hambleden in the afternoon.

Both morning and afternoon walks will include time for 'walking and talking' as well as sections for walking in silence following a brief led reflection. At lunchtime we will have a led reflection and stillness, followed by time to chat over a packed lunch and explore the church.

Please meet at the Car Park near Mill End (RG9 6TL) from 10am for a prompt departure at 10.30am. The car park gets quite busy on summer weekends, so please do car share where possible. Directions: from the A4155 (which links Marlow and Henley-on-Thames). Travelling from Marlow, after approx. 4.5 miles as you approach Mill End and some houses (30mph area) take a turn right into Skirmett Road, signposted to Fingest, Skirmett and Hambleden and indicating to Car Park 500yds (also a brown sign for Chiltern Valley Winery and Brewery). Please bring water, a packed lunch and some cash if you wish to join in afternoon tea in Hambleden. There is no charge for the day but we would like to make an offering to our host church if possible. The toilets in the car park are currently closed, so do stop and find facilities before you arrive if you have travelled some distance. There is a toilet which will be opened for our use at our lunch stop church.

As the route is along a river valley, there may be some mud if weather has been wet in the preceding weeks. Please wear suitable walking boots or shoes and bring a waterproof coat if it looks like there may be rain on the day, or sunhat and sunscreen if (as we hope!) it's going to be sunny.

There is no need for formal booking - we will leave promptly at 10.30am with whoever has arrived and will go ahead whatever the weather. There is only patchy mobile phone signal in the area so we can't rely on receiving messages about late arrivals etc. However ... if you would like to do the shorter walk option we do need to know beforehand as it will involve additional arrangements for arriving earlier and placing the right number of cars at the midway

point. You are also welcome to let us know that you are intending to come for the whole walk so we have a rough idea of numbers.

Please contact Jo Howard at jhoward597@gmail.com to register interest or for further information.

Living in the Land of "I Don't Know"

It used to be
That when I would wake in the morning
I could with confidence say,
 'What am 'I' going to
 do?'
That was before the seed
 cracked open.
Now Hafiz is certain:
there are two of us housed
 in this body,
doing the shopping together in the market and
 tickling each other
while fixing the evening's food.
Now when I awake
all the internal instruments play the same
 music:
 'God, what love-mischief can 'We' do
 for the world
 today?
*(The Gift – Poems by Hafiz, translation by
Daniel Ladinsky)*

I can't run away from uncertainty and not knowing, so I'll jump in with two feet, splash around and have some fun. What love-mischief can we do today?!

Anne Crosthwait

Contemplative Fire, Community Leader Canada

Notes from the Trustees' Meeting, 25 May

Chair Francoise Pinteaux-Jones writes:

An important part of the meeting was given over to financial matters. After the news of the setting up of online banking and the recovery of Gift Aid for several years were gladly recorded, Sally took to the floor. Sally has taken over from Chris Holmes, our former Treasurer for many years, who was formally thanked for his sterling

services and she helped us come to grips with financial matters. She presented a draft budget based on the figures to the end of March 2018 and shared her enthusiasm for what some of us may regard as number-crunching, inviting us instead to see budgeting as a tool for development and growth.

It was agreed that a joint budget-setting meeting be convened with members of the Board and the Hub, in line with the latter's responsibility for events and the production of material.

The issue of welcoming new Companions has been a matter of concern for the Board for some time. Accordingly Elaine Wilkins had been asked to reflect with Jo Howard on the manner and implications of such a process. As a result, she presented us with a request from Jo to mobilise Companions for a preliminary reflection on what makes us Community. The Board discussion that ensued could serve to illustrate the timeliness of the matter. We are accordingly looking into the possible ways to ensure that we communally reflect on the essence of our togetherness.

It will not have escaped many Companions that, after a promising start, our Website went through a tricky patch when "we" (namely unstinting Tina and Helen) had to find a new host and web support at a moment's notice, deferring the launch of our Theological Underpinning section in the process. My recent perusal suggests things have stabilised, but a number of issues remain unresolved, partly due to the structure of the site, and could do with the expertise of our Community to find ways round these, in collaboration with the new host, ESP.

Notes from the Hub Meeting, Saltmarshe, Yorkshire, April

Steward Ann Worrall writes:

Our Hub group met together for the third of our four meetings annually in the beautiful setting of Companion and Trustee Jeremy Timm's home. We have tried to meet at different geographical locations this year, in order to give us the opportunity to meet up with Companions

around the country and to ensure the travel is not all one way, and we try to tie the meeting in with another event which may be happening in that area the next day (in this case a wonderful Pilgrimage to Nowhere day). We were also treated to a meal which Jeremy cooked for us on the Friday evening, which enabled us to relax and share some conviviality.

There were nine of us at this meeting, including two trustees, Caroline and Jeremy, and also Sally Livsey, who travelled up from Devon to give us an explanation of the accounts and how the finances will work in a more effective and streamlined way as we go forward. Sally will be giving the same talk to the Trustees, helping to ensure that we are working in tandem.

We reviewed the events we had organised, looking at whether they had met their purpose and decided whether to re-run them.



The Retreat at Holland House in February was considered to have met our needs and we agreed that a weekend silent retreat was something which fills a gap in our events, with a particular aim to encourage those who may not have been on a retreat before. We were helped considerably with the cost by a grant from the Community Foundation Wales and a first time visitors' discount from Holland House. We do need to ensure it is fully booked to avoid a loss.

The Mount St Bernard's Community Fellowship event was well received as an opportunity for learning and for fellowship, and we have booked provisionally for March next year. Thank you to all the Companions who played a part in that event.

We established that four events annually - a Weekend Silent Retreat, a Fellowship Weekend, a Week Silent Retreat and the Community Weekend - would give us a good structure for our annual events, with additional events such as Wisdom on the Way days, Pilgrimages to Nowhere and other events arranged locally.

If we are to offer two retreats a year, we need

to find suitably skilled Companions who are willing to lead them, or to act as a trainee to an experienced retreat leader, with a view to leading retreats themselves in the future. We would appreciate any suggestions around this theme and if anyone feels drawn to this work, please let us know. Retreats are always led by two people and their places are paid for.

We would really like to find better ways of communicating with Companions around the country. We tend to talk of 'CF North' or 'Sheffield' and 'CF South', but that is hugely widespread and maybe we could get better at defining our regions and helping to advertise events in the regions.

We spent some time ensuring planning for Wisdom on the Way days in May, July and November were properly underway and supported. The Hub tries to creatively develop our Contemplative Fire themes for Companions around the country on these days. The next one at White Waltham in July will, however, just take advantage of the beautiful grounds and be an opportunity to meet up and converse with each other, or to have a day of silence, with a picnic and no theme. November will be in the North and will be around a Faith and Justice theme.

We are finding the Hub days a great learning experience and an opportunity for creativity in shaping how Contemplative Fire goes forward. We are practising sharing responsibilities, realising the skills and talents each of us has and how much they contribute to the group dynamics and spread out via the Hub to the community as a whole. We carefully consider ideas and then take the risk to try them out. We can challenge assumptions safely. It's fun to be allowed 'I wonder if....' and then find, after lots of warm sharing of 'but what ifs', that what has been an old 'tradition' can now be adapted for these times, a freshness being able to be expressed. Radical it isn't (yet!), but we are seeing stability, a clarification (see our Terms of Reference coming on the website), an unravelling of complications and a light able to shine through uncertainties.

We are planning the Community Weekend now, and are hoping it is fully booked. Bishop Anne, our new bishop accompanier, has agreed to come and speak to us and it will be a good opportunity to meet her. And apart from that, it will be great to meet up with all the fellow travellers who make up our wonderful Contemplative Fire community.

We would be delighted if anyone felt they would like to come and give time to the community by coming on the Hub. It's a very special opportunity to serve and learn, have fun and grow. Expenses are available, so travel costs are not an issue. We need fresh thoughts, eyes and ears every year to keep us on our toes. Just drop a line to Tina and she will pass it to us. Or have a chat. Or call! Go on, just do it!

Pilgrimage to Now/here Saltmarshe, April

- Community, Healing & Wonder -

"...Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another..." (1 John verses 10 & 11, NRSV)



Ali Dorey and Gill Greenwood write:

Our preparations for this pilgrimage grew out of reflections on what it means to live in community with one another, building on the reflections of Abbot Erik Varden of Mount St Bernard Abbey at our Community Fellowship Weekend. Contemplative Fire is a dispersed community - we are Companions together on the road, rather than living together under one roof. How can we travel light and dwell deep with one another, honing one another, lovingly sharing healing and wonder together? We asked participants to bring an experience of wonder and an experience of struggle they have had.

We began with Bible stories from Mark, Luke and Matthew to explore how Jesus' healing of people also restored them to community: the bleeding woman, Zaccheus the tax collector, the leper, the man plagued with demons, the "sinful woman". After Lectio Divina and Listening 3s, Gill and Ali shared personal stories illustrating vulnerability with the community present. Companions and Friends were then invited to share something that made them vulnerable in confidential Listening 3s.

After lunch we walked down through the trees to the river, with three pauses for reflection on a reading and two poems.

Reflection - Mark Berry (CMS, March 2018)

"I've been thinking about intimacy/community/friendship recently. I used to nod when people talked about love being what happens when you care more about what you can give to the other rather than what you can get... but that is still a transactional relationship, with one cast as giver and one as receiver. It's still a relationship built on power, even if that power is altruistic and switches from one to the other at different points. It can still result in self-serving and dependency.

I used to buy into the notion that people "complete" one another, but that puts immense pressure on each party to effectively fill in the gaps of the other. It's still about what I do for you and you do for me. It's still based on projecting my need to heal or be healed on the other. What happens if the balance is out? What happens if the one 'completing' doesn't have the answers or the capacity? Or the one being 'completed' remains unfulfilled?

My experience of relationships/communities built on these well-meaning notions is that they are ultimately compromised. Where the gaps remain unfilled the nerve becomes increasingly exposed and the pain more and more acute. Dependency, even if it is temporary, is mutually unhealthy and unfulfilling.

So I think what I'm left with is something I'm learning from my monastic brothers and sisters. What matters is deep presence. What if we just are... together? How do/can we grow in mutual silence and proximity? What happens when we do nothing... together?

Intimacy does not seem to me to be a product of exchange but of the willingness to sit, exposed and vulnerable with another. With no desire to solve or be solved, with no expectation other than the commitment to remain. I think I'm realising that real intimacy can't be about what I do for you, or what you do for me. It has to be about simply being 'us'."



I Worried by Mary Oliver

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers flow in the right direction, will the earth turn as it was taught, and if not, how shall I correct it?

Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven, can I do better?

Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows can do it and I am, well, hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it, am I going to get rheumatism, lockjaw, dementia?

Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing. And gave it up. And took my old body and went out into the morning, and sang.



Almost a conversation by Mary Oliver

I have not really, not yet, talked with otter about his life.

He has so many teeth, he has trouble with vowels.

Wherefore our understanding is all body expression -

he swims like the sleekest fish,

he dives and exhales and lifts a trail of bubbles.

Little by little he trusts my eyes

and my curious body sitting on the shore.

Sometimes he comes close.
I admire his whiskers
and his dark fur which I would rather die than wear.

He has no words, still what he tells about his life
is clear.

He does not own a computer.
He imagines the river will last forever.
He does not envy the dry house I live in.
He does not wonder who or what it is that I worship.
He wonders, morning after morning, that the river
is so cold and fresh and alive, and still
I don't jump in.

We ended the day by sharing the Gift of Gaze –
in pairs, making eye contact and reading “You
are a child of the light”:

*You are a child of the light
A child of God
And God delights in you
And says to you
Well done my
Good and faithful friend
My blessing is upon you
My strength within you
And my love around you
Walk in the path
I have set before you
I will never leave you
Or let you go.*

Wait For Strength

Gill Greenwood writes:

You may know that I was recently offered the opportunity of setting up a singing group for survivors. At the time I was offered this opportunity, I found myself struggling and wondering whether I had done the right thing in accepting. A few days later, we had a Way Beyond Religion evening – Pentecost. The readings didn't particularly speak to me. Then Jacky offered a poem by Ian Adams from his book “Breathing Deep”:

Wait for Strength

Don't force the future.

*Wait for the strength that you will need
To do whatever must be done.
At the right time, it will be yours.*

As if from on high

strength

will

descend

and settle upon you.

Wait for the strength, then rise.

I was filled with something that I cannot describe. I was filled with something that gave me the strength and courage to carry on.

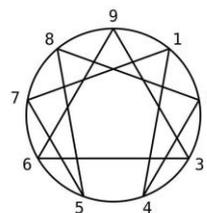
Dear Companions and Friends,

Just to say that this is my last CF Post. It is time for me to put it down and for someone else to pick it up and grow and develop it. Thank you to all of you who have sent contributions, words, images, poems, reflections to feed our community.

With love and gratitude, Gill



Introduction to the Enneagram “The Nine Faces of the Soul” with Gordon Melvin



From supertime Fri 19th Oct – lunchtime Sun 21st Oct, residential at Douai Abbey, nr Reading.

Cost: £150 (with support from charitable funding)

Companions write: “The 2 day experience was extraordinarily effective in opening my mind to difference”.

“Gordon Melvin’s presentation was exceptional”.

“It was challenging, inspiring, hard work and very worthwhile”.

Contact: info@contemplativefire.org