

REACHING OUT



The Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies

AUTUMN / WINTER 2014

The Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies (QFAS) is a Listed Informal Group of the Religious Society of Friends. QFAS aims to explore evidence for survival of death, to provide a forum for discussion on this and related subjects and to learn from and support those with psychic gifts and experiences. It aims to do this within the Quaker movement, and in society in general by liaising with other groups with like aims.

Website: www.quakerfellowshipforafterlifestudies.co.uk

Our new website offers a discussion forum as well as news events and publications. QFAS members should contact the Web Manager for a password for the forum: rhonda@riachi.free-online.co.uk

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Contributions to future editions of *Reaching Out* (including photographs etc for cover) should be sent to the editor preferably by email but, if that is not possible, by post. Please include your name and, if sending by post, your postal address or telephone number. Please also say whether you are happy to have your name included with the item in the magazine or would prefer your contribution to be published anonymously.

Reaching Out is produced twice a year in May and November. The deadlines for receiving articles and other material are the end of March and end of September.

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We aim to record all the talks given at conferences if the speaker is willing, and these are eventually available as CDs. The full text of talks, when provided by the speaker, appear on the website under "Newletters and Talks". Summaries appear in *Reaching Out* and offers to write summaries are welcomed.



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Welcome to the latest edition of *Reaching Out*. Thank you to all those who have sent me contributions. Details of how to send future contributions are inside the front cover.

Cherry Simpkin

Front Cover photograph - The photograph on the front cover was taken at the Autumn Conference at Ammerdown, by Cherry Simpkin. The piece is called 'Shalom'.

Back cover photograph - Friends at the Ammerdown Conference on the labyrinth, taken by Angela Howard.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions for the year 2015 are due on 1st January. The rate is £10.00 waged, £7.00 unwaged or retired. Please send your subscriptions to our Treasurer, Cherry Simpkin (see contact details inside front cover).

It helps to keep down administrative costs if members pay by standing order so please consider arranging to pay your subscription this way if you do not already do so. Standing Order forms may be obtained from the Treasurer or can be downloaded from the QFAS website at www.quakerfellowshipforafterlifestudies.co.uk/contacts (scroll down to the bottom of the web page).

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Spring Conference 2014

Your committee has reluctantly decided not to hold a Spring Gathering in 2015 because we have not been able to find anyone willing and able to organise it. We are sorry about this decision because we see the day, as well as being an enjoyable and informative time, as an opportunity for Friends who are interested, but not too sure of what they are committing themselves to, to 'dip their toe in the water'. We had planned to hold it at Westminster Meeting House because the cost of the George Fox room at Friends House was £469 giving a shortfall of £239 on the fees received for bookings. If you feel able to help with the organising of future events please contact Angela or Cherry (see front cover for contact details).

Autumn Conference 2014

This will be held at Woodbrooke from 18 to 20 September, 2015. It will be a joint event with Friends' Fellowship of Healing. The title is "Spiritual Beings on a Human Journey". Booking details will follow in the Spring issue of Reaching Out.



CONFERENCE REPORTS

The QFAS Spring Conference was held on Saturday, 26 April, 2014 at Friends' House. The speakers were Jill Inskip and Harvey Gillman. Their talks are summarised below. Rhonda Riachi also gave a short talk explaining the new website.

"A PERSONAL JOURNEY THROUGH CANCER"
—TALK BY JILL INSKIP TO THE QFAS SPRING CONFERENCE.
A reflection by Angela Howard.

Jill Inskip has been an enthusiastic and warmly supportive member at the heart of QFAS since it came into being in 2000. When we were putting together the contributions for the anthology, *The Not Unfamiliar Country*, printed in 2001, we received a lovely piece from Jill. She wrote about watching her Grandfather die, and seeing him greet his wife who came to lead him into the afterlife.

Jill had prepared her talk for the Spring Conference with great care, and as she has a lovely speaking voice she was a pleasure to listen to. She described how she was diagnosed with a virulent form of ovarian cancer in 2008 at the age of 78, and led us movingly and in great detail along her own personal pathway from diagnosis, through treatment to eventual cure.

She comes of a 'strongly medical family' with 13 close members who are qualified doctors! It was therefore hardly surprising that she took the orthodox medical route. She stressed gently but firmly that that this was her personal choice and that everyone must take their own decisions and make their own way. She was emphatic however that early diagnosis and treatment is essential for all.

It seems right to me to quote a section of Jill's talk verbatim so as to give a flavour of the deep spiritual conviction with which she spoke, and which forms the basis of her life.

"...I had grown up from childhood with the conviction that physical death is not the end of the story, and all that I have learnt from all of you in QFAS has only confirmed that fundamental belief. Obviously there is always more in this life that one would like to accomplish, but only if one's health is not in serious decline. I felt that I was allowed to be concerned about the painful disintegration of the body that the end, in my case, might involve, but I fully accepted the fact that I had no rational claim on continuing physical life for its own sake. The only really important thing, it seemed to me, was to try to ensure that my soul would be as ready as possible to advance to whatever lay ahead, and I actually felt quite grateful to have sufficient time in which to address that at a very deep level.

"My hope was, of course, that I would be cured, but that seemed very unlikely given my grim prognosis. My prayer was that I should be upheld throughout whatever challenges were to face me in the coming months and also that that I should learn whatever lessons were needful as a result of my experiences.

"Along with this went a firm conviction that it is quite wrong to take up a belligerent attitude towards cancer. It is, after all, a part of oneself and may well have been contracted for a purpose – so to speak of 'going to war' with it, or 'losing the fight' against it seems to me to be completely misguided. In one's own strength one can do absolutely nothing to eliminate it. Let the doctors make the decisions and let the drugs do the fighting, was my philosophy – but let my prayers and my faith in the loving purposes of God steer my spirit through whatever I had to contend with while undergoing the process. An attitude of total surrender at every point of my treatment proved to be an enormous blessing to me. Whenever I had to undergo some new procedure, the outcome of which was, inevitably, uncertain (I'm talking here of the operation, CT scans, blood tests etc.) I used to say in my heart, 'Thy grace is sufficient for me', and the sense of being utterly enfolded in God's love which always came as a result of that complete self-giving, relaxed, consoled and strengthened me in a quite wonderful and indescribable way."

Jill's talk was greatly appreciated, and was followed by many moving contributions from Friends present. These were her concluding words:

"Something I find impossible to define or explain adequately but which is both beautiful and even quite thrilling is that, from my treatment onwards, life seems to have been touched with a special sort of luminosity which it did not have before – perfectly happy though I used to be – and which feels as if it is now woven into my inner being for ever. I have occasionally wondered whether this has come about simply as a natural consequence of having been through something of a baptism of fire – and I should be so interested to know whether others have had a similar experience when faced with life-changing challenges of any sort.

There is, I understand, an Irish tradition which suggests that, at the moment of death, the spirit comes back to kiss the body one last time – to bid it farewell and thank it for all its usefulness during life. I am, of course, very glad to be inhabiting my own body for a little longer than at one time seemed likely, and I'm very conscious, too, of the continuing requirement to use my body in God's service for as long as is deemed right. One day, though, I shall be kissing it goodbye, and then, I am sure, all that I have gained from this recent and remarkable experience of cancer, as well as all that I have learnt from QFAS during the past ten years (and will, no doubt, continue to learn in future) will prove to be of enormous benefit. As Edith Sitwell wrote in her poem, 'Eurydice', Love is not changed by Death.....And nothing is lost, and all in the end is harvest'."



**'THIS I HAVE FOUND EXPERIMENTALLY'
- TALK BY HARVEY GILLMAN TO THE QFAS SPRING CONFERENCE.**

Summarised by Cherry Simpkin

Harvey began by expressing his surprise that he was at a QFAS conference at all since the question of life after death had never been an important one for him. However, he liked the challenge of 'exploring new territory' and, in any case, he still wasn't sure what he believed. He sees his spiritual journey as being like travelling through the corridor of a large house with rooms on either side to be explored. Sometimes there are unexpected treasures to be found behind their doors. This is why he often accepts unexpected invitations.

When George Fox talked of knowing things 'experimentally' he meant he knew through experience. For Harvey, theology is a reflection on the ultimate, based on what we and others have experienced. If that is so then the greatest danger is to try to formulate some all-embracing theory. There are many ways of joining up the dots. The patterns we may make may well speak more of our own psychological needs than of

any factual description of the how the world, whichever world, may be.

He spoke two experiences relating to the death of those near to him.

He had never been close to his father while he was alive. He found himself becoming closer to him after he died and still feels that in some way he teaches him. His father's death inspired Harvey to write a series of poems and in the writing he found himself growing closer to his father and understanding him better.

The second experience involved a close male friend with whom he had lost touch. One day, wondering what had happened to him, he prayed that somehow he would be given the answer. Shortly after he met someone by accident who turned out to know his friend and told Harvey he had died. It was as though this informant was a messenger come in answer to his prayer. He is aware of an interconnection of things and that there is a way of knowing which transcends the rational. Often things happen as if they are arranged.

Harvey feels life is full of encounters with 'messengers'. He was once asked by a group of nuns whether he believed in the communion of saints. Having reflected on this, he decided that he did but more in terms of the influences that people (or 'messengers') in this life, whether contemporary or from the past, have on one another.

As an Anglican, Harvey's partner is convinced that there is a heaven to which everyone will go eventually. In the afterlife they will go on living as unique people but in new way liberated from the constraints of this world. Harvey cannot believe this but is willing to be proved wrong. His sense is of being taken up into greater light in a more impersonal way. Yet, he is prepared to believe that one day he will discover for himself which vision is more accurate.

Some believe that if there is a loving God and yet so much suffering in the world, then life after death provides a place of compensation and justice. This came about in Hebrew thinking during the time of the Exile but, as John Bowker points out in his introduction to *'The Complete Bible'*, most of the Hebrew Bible came into being without any belief in reward after death. It was more a matter of keeping faith with God.

For some, heaven and hell are in the here and now rather than states or places we encounter after death. This, and the attraction for many of the mystical tradition, means that the idea of eternity has largely replaced the idea of immortality. We seek for eternity in a grain of sand rather than beyond the stars. Yet the mystics talked of the eternal present because they also believed in the immortality of the soul. Those who are interested in the mystical path but are less sure of immortality are faced with a dilemma, for, however, intense our awareness of the eternal in the profound moments of our lives, we still are faced by the demands of living in a world of time, of decline, and of our own mortality. So questions about the nature of immortality still confront us.

Joseph Sharp, a chaplain for the terminally ill in at an American hospital, wrote in his book, *Living our Dying*, of the dangers of escapism, whereby we may adopt a spiritual 'talk' so we don't have to feel the pain of our worldly 'walking' unavoidably headlong into pain, suffering, and eventual death. This is sometimes called 'spiritual bypassing', the use of the spiritual to avoid the risks of living in the here and now. We need to learn how to live with impermanence in our field of action now; this is where we live with the risks of not-knowing, even for those who consider this life as an ante-chamber to a life beyond.

A lovely yet sad song of Peggy Lee asks 'Is this all there is?' If the answer is yes, all will die and that is all, how does that affect the way we live now? If the answer is no, it will not all cease, how then do we live in the here and now?

Harvey has found that some of the greatest 'messengers' to him have been artists and especially poets. Poets do not give answers as much as ask questions and we must answer from our own experience and honesty.

The Spanish poet Antonio Machado asks:

*And is that world of yours to die with you,
the old life you renewed and set in order?
Have the anvils and crucibles of your spirit
laboured here only for dust and wind*

If the answer is that the anvils and the crucibles of the spirit may not have laboured only for dust and wind, what then? What have they laboured for?



REPORT ON THE AMMERDOWN CONFERENCE (SEPT 26 – 28)

Angela Howard

"We need to make our voices heard and it will take some courage."

There is always a buzz when Friends meet each other after a long time, in a new place, and with the anticipation of an interesting conference ahead. At a QFAS weekend there is also the sense of relief, often expressed, that at least for a short time we are free to speak openly and be ourselves.

During the first session of the Ammerdown conference there was something else in the air which hasn't been there before: a feeling of frustration powerful enough to drive us to towards personal and corporate action.

It was a session in which we were considering QFAS as a group, in existence now for nearly 15 years. Some of us have been members from the start and have watched it grow. There have been residential and day conferences each year and the group has produced

booklets, newsletters, CDs of talks, and established a website. Our members have written books and articles and given well researched talks. I think we can consider ourselves a maturing group with good credentials.

QFAS was formed with the intention of studying the evidence for the existence of an afterlife in which the personality survives and continues to develop. And the anecdotal evidence has proved to be enormous - almost overwhelmingly so - and enormously convincing, though much of it hidden because of a taboo about discussing spiritual/psychic experience.

What shocks and frustrates us is that this taboo exists in our Quaker Meetings as well as in the wider world. We suffer from it ourselves and we know of Friends who are perhaps more vulnerable and have suffered even more. Any attempt to talk about spiritual/psychic experience and we get "the glazed look" or worse. Rejection is what we fear if we speak out, and perhaps being thought soft headed. And this in a Society which has a spiritual basis and an Advice which says: "Be open to new light from whatever source it may come."

After an introduction in which I passed briefly over the years since 2000, and mentioned some of the Friends who had contributed to the work of the Fellowship, the subject was before the meeting.

And the Spirit seemed to be moving. I will list just some of the ideas being expressed, without attributing them. I think we all felt that the Friends who spoke might well be speaking for all of us.

The Society of Friends has drifted off course. Early Friends would have understood and been able to share our experience. Scientific Materialism has a lot to answer for – and yet the great scientists, Quakers amongst them, have always retained a sense of humility, awe and open mindedness.

In a Society based on experiential faith Friends should not be afraid to talk about their own.

Most Friends nowadays are interested in the here and now – quite rightly – but we need also to consider life in a wider context. This is what gives meaning to our existence. If this wider dimension is denied in our Quaker Meetings, the Society becomes nothing more than "A Group of Nice People Interested in the Environment" or "Social Workers". The Society of Friends should not be in the business of promoting disbelief in a spiritual world underpinning the material.

We need to Come Out and it may be more difficult to Come Out as a QFAS-er than to come out as Gay or Lesbian. We need to give ourselves a lot of love and overcome the fear of rejection. It is the other person's problem.

Let's take strength from being part of the Fellowship group and from the realisation

that historically many Friends are behind us. We could perhaps 'travel in the ministry' supporting one another.

We were reminded that there are other ways to be aware of the spiritual world and God, based on going to the depths of our own being. Spirituality is an intrinsic part of human experience the world over. Accumulating evidence is only one aspect of the process.

When talking with someone fearful of death, we need to ask what they have experienced in their own lives which would suggest that there is something more. Most people can recall an experience. It is a starting point. Listen, listen, listen to the other person and find a way in to help them.

Time was going on and we'd had a long day. We knew we wanted to decide on some corporate action before we parted. We used the AGM on the Saturday afternoon to continue the discussion, having listened to two excellent talks in the morning (one by David Britton and the other by Cherry Simpkin). We decided to write a minute. The committee had met briefly after breakfast and were able to offer a first draft. It became the Ammerdown minute. We wanted to keep it short and pithy but felt that it needed some background information to explain our group. This was also drafted. Time was pressing as we had a full programme. Some minor tidying up was done after the conference weekend.

We decided to send the Minute to the Framework for Action Consultation Process. This group is considering the direction the Society of Friends should be taking in the next five years. (This has been done. The Minute has also gone to the Quaker Life Network and has appeared in their newsletter.)

This started off the corporate action, but members are also encouraged to take personal action. (LMs, AMs and individual Friends are also invited to send contributions to the Framework Consultation Group. Write to

Peter Sender, Strategy & Development Coordinator, The Recording Clerk's Office, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BJ. Or email Peters@quaker.org.uk www.quaker.org.uk. Contributions should be sent in by the end of January, 2015.)

Maybe you could start a local group in your LM or AM? Once there is a group, meetings, even if small, can be advertised, and interested Friends may be attracted along. You may find that there are some who are very much needing support and a chance to speak, and there could be surprises as to who they are! There are Friends who are urgently needing to share with us.

Please let Cherry Simpkin or myself know of your own ideas and actions or post them on the website. One Friend has already had the Ammerdown Minute read out at her Meeting and left on the table. Apparently there was some interest expressed.

The committee might be able to find a speaker for a local group if you would like, or you could use a CD or book/booklet as a starting point for a discussion. We are in this together!



THE AMMERDOWN MINUTE

Minute produced by the Ammerdown Conference held 26 – 28 September
"Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come?"

Members of Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies, meeting at the Ammerdown Conference Centre for our annual residential conference 26 – 28 September, 2014, are concerned and saddened that the abundant evidence for the continuation of life beyond physical death is frequently disregarded by the wider Society. Early Friends took for granted the existence of an afterlife, but it seems to us that at the present time the Society is in danger of losing this vital sense of spiritual continuity.

As Britain Yearly Meeting seeks to discern "what we are led to do together" in the future, we ask that ways of taking this concern forward are given consideration. We send this minute to Quaker Life Central Committee, the Quaker Life Network and the Framework Working Group. (signed) *Angela Howard, Clerk.*

Background to the Ammerdown Minute.

The Quaker Fellowship for Afterlife Studies is a Listed Interest Group of Britain Yearly Meeting which has been in existence since 2000 and has a membership of over 160 Friends and attenders.

The website is at www.quakerfellowshipforafterlifestudies.

A magazine "*Reaching Out*" is circulated twice yearly.

QFAS has held a residential and a day conference each year since 2000 and has produced leaflets and booklets. Workshops and special interest groups have been offered at YM and YM Gatherings and are always well attended and appreciated.

Our members have given talks and written articles and books. We have made a careful study of the evidence for the existence of an afterlife and find it to be well documented and overwhelmingly positive. The reliable literature is vast and constantly growing.

Those who care for the dying either as family and friends or in a professional capacity, frequently report a similar pattern of events which strongly suggest that as death approaches there is a growing awareness of relatives and friends who return to accompany the dying person. These have been termed End of Life Experiences (ELEs). Ref. "*The Art of Dying*" by Dr Peter Fenwick and Elizabeth Fenwick. Pub 2008. Continuum Books. ISBN 978-08264-9923-3.

Following death it is often reported that the soul is seen to leave the body. Nurses are usually well aware of this phenomenon. In the weeks and months following a death, relatives and close friends on Earth are often visited by the person who has died. This is usually a brief contact in which a few words may be heard or the person may actually appear. Sometimes there may be an unusually vivid dream. The message seems to be: "I am all right. I am still alive." Sometimes there may be more sustained and continuing contact.

QFAS members are acutely and painfully aware that there are Friends in our Meetings who have what we term spiritual/psychic experiences but are unable to speak about them. Obviously each contact made to us must be treated with confidentiality and no records are kept, but it has become clear to us that Friends are suffering distress because of a lack of understanding and acceptance in their Meetings.

We feel an urgent need now to speak of our experiences to the rest of the Society of Friends, which seems to be moving away from its original spiritual roots towards a position more influenced by the scientific materialism of the modern western world. The truly great scientists have always been open minded and have retained a sense of humility and awe.



QFAS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 2014 AGM was held on the afternoon of Saturday 27 September at Ammerdown. Here are the main items of interest which resulted.

Appointment of Committee and Officers

The committee and officers, as agreed at the AGM, are: David Britton, Angela Howard (clerk and membership secretary) Geoffrey Martin, Ros Smith, Cherry Simpkin (editor of Reaching Out and treasurer), Elizabeth Angas. Elizabeth Angas was welcomed onto the committee following the resignation of Sylvia Izzard, who was thanked for her service.

Finances

The Treasurer, Cherry Simpkin, reported that the balance of the accounts, after payment of the conference bill to Ammerdown, is £1819. This includes a grant of £1,000 received from the Joseph Rowntree Trust arranged by Tina Day. This is earmarked to be held in reserve for deposits on future conferences which are extremely high and need to be paid out two years in advance of any booking fees coming in. We still need to try and increase our funds by all possible means.

Conferences and gatherings

It was agreed there would be no Spring Conference in 2015. The Autumn Conference has been booked at Woodbrooke (see above).

A group of Friends, Jackie Bartlett, Cherry Simpkin and Christine Simmons was appointed to arrange the residential conference in the autumn 2016.

In future Cherry Simpkin, our treasurer, will receive direct all monies, annual subscriptions and conference booking fees.



AN UNEXPECTED HAPPENING.

By Shirley Walford

I'm a long-term attender at Hall Green Meeting in Birmingham and sometime last year Clement Jewitt, who is a member of QFAS, passed me a copy of *'Only a Thought Away'*, by Angela Howard, because I'm the librarian.

Immediately I read it I realised it was important, and that introducing it would need care. I was just about to bring it up when a much loved Friend and member of the meeting passed away. Because of the controversial nature of the subject matter I decided to postpone my introduction and wait till things settled down. I did not want to upset anyone so I put the book on a shelf and forgot about it.

This all happened at the end of November. Christmas came and went. I was busy and never gave the book another thought. Then, early in January, I woke up in the middle of the night and heard a voice. It was speaking as clearly as if someone was standing in the room beside me. It said, 'They'll read the book, say, 'Very interesting,' and put it back on the shelf. That's not enough.'

I knew exactly which book they were referring to, that I was being asked to take the matter further. And this wasn't a message just for me. It was meant for the whole of the Meeting.

QFAS was going for many years before I heard about it. I was interested, but I'm also writing a novel which is very long and I'm very slow (I hope to get it finished this year). Because of this I'd put the Fellowship on a list of things to look at, after I'd finished writing when I had more time. Now someone had entrusted me with this task and they obviously expected me to get on with it. Oh dear.

Initially I was filled with wild ideas about it, but spoke to Clement first. He gave me some sensible advice and brought me down to earth. He suggested we ask the meeting if I could start a group linked to QFAS, and some things we could do. He offered his help. 'We'll see how you get on,' he said. (A few months later he brought

his fiancée to the meeting, Margaret, the Margaret in Angela's book, and announced he was leaving so he could live with her in Stroud.)

I joined QFAS and Angela invited me to the Spring Conference. This enabled me to meet a few people and get a taste of the fellowship. I enjoyed it but wasn't completely sure what to make of it until next day when I found myself brimming over with ideas.

Some months later I requested and was given a slot on the agenda at my Hall Green Meeting PM.

'I'm not sure what this is about,' said our clerk. 'If it's a description of the Spring Conference you said you went to, that goes in Notices. If it's business, a request for action, it can go in PM.'

I'd been thinking of mentioning a certain amount of background to explain myself. It was a good thing she clarified matters or I would have gone on too long and got off to a bad start. I said I wanted to make three requests.

What I asked for was: one, if anyone was interested, could I start a group linked to QFAS. Two, could I be our Meeting's official representative, and three, I didn't care if they thought I was bonkers but could we discuss it in a friendly and Quakerly manner, please. There were meetings, I told them somberly, where the response had been, well, not quite what one would expect.

The early Quakers had taken it for granted there was an afterlife. It was an important part of their beliefs, I said, but somehow since then we'd lost it despite all the evidence in support. People don't see the evidence so they don't believe it's there. Scientists and the media make fun of it and deny its existence and we go along with it. It's become part of our culture and beliefs.

One person who is very well read in Quakerism and history in general, said the early Friends were conservative in their views and not at all bothered about the afterlife. Since then I've thought we could have a fruitful evening looking at what the early Friends did say about it, which appears to be, actually, quite a lot! From the little I've read about it so far, it seems to have underpinned all they did.

The historian didn't like the word 'afterlife,' either. Someone else agreed. It should be 'continuing life', she said. I can see her point but it does sound a bit of a mouthful.

One Friend informed me very kindly that if we held some meetings I must not think she didn't believe in the afterlife if she didn't come. She's a very busy person and lectures at Woodbrooke. She confirmed that she did believe in it and didn't need evidence. Someone else said the same.

The chairman said he didn't understand why people couldn't discuss it good-naturedly.

Our meeting tries very hard to accommodate different views though we admit it can be very difficult at times.

Some Friends were definitely interested in hearing the evidence. The person who wanted to call it 'continuing life' was interested in how it connected with healing. Our meeting is a very friendly one and they were very nice and we decided I would give a talk on the evidence at our September shared lunch. I'm also the social organiser and September is the time when we decide on the programme for our house meetings and other events in the year. They said if people wanted to carry on after the talk we could start a group and I could be our 'co-ordinator' with QFAS. I hope I'm able to raise enough support to keep the momentum going and will report back later on how we progressed.



PHYSICALLY FAR AWAY BUT PSYCHICALLY PRESENT

By Elizabeth Angas

Are we able to be 'present' at somebody's death without being actually there? Can we support them through their 'passing over' whilst physically being somewhere else?

This possibility of one's spirit-self assisting someone who is dying was the subject of my talk to the London CFPSS group on 1 February 2014. In particular, we discussed helping a person on death row to withstand their execution and thus to pass over into the Afterlife knowing their hand is being psychically held, able to know that their spirit/soul will be welcomed into that loving home in eternity.

The background to this talk was my long experience of having penfriends on death row. Since the late 90's when the Quaker, Jan Arriens, founded 'Lifelines' (www.lifelines-uk.org.uk) I have been writing to men in a Texas prison. Gradually, over the years, my letters have started to help each prisoner with his coming execution. As well as supporting them emotionally and spiritually, I try to make them aware that I can accompany them psychically. This, I believe, is often reassuring and comforting for them.

I first discovered this absent/distant ability through becoming a Quaker Spiritual Healer. Rather than just be a conduit for contact healing, we more often "hold a person in the Light". We are thus doing distant healing. We believe the Holy Spirit is sending that healing and creative power through us to a needy person or situation. So the healing is being channelled through from God. No doubt, healers in other Christian denominations and faiths 'know' that this happens whenever we have the 'intention for healing' and have tuned in to whatever they call 'the Source'. We do not ask for anything specific. It is enough to hold the person's name in the Light. We know it is a

"Thy will be done" situation. So whatever God knows is needed will reach them. This may be an imperceptible result, a holistic cure or a peaceful death. Helping terminally ill people to have a good death is another experience I now use with my penfriends. I used to help people and their friends and relatives to become reconciled to dying, whilst putting their affairs in order. Thus, they were more able to have a peaceful death and become more certain of their immortality and what awaits us in the Afterlife. I know this, personally, from having had an NDE where I experienced being embraced in Love. I also feel I know it from such convincing books as *'Testimony of Light'* by Helen Greaves.

So, I am able to pass many of these experiences onto my penfriends on death row. I feel this is compassionate work which I am 'meant' to do, that is I received a 'leading' to do it. I also then realised I could use my other skills and experiences in doing this work. I was inspired by the work of the Phoenix Trust in the UK (www.theppt.org.uk) who send yoga teachers into prisons. I have also been a prison visitor and penfriend to lifers in this country. So, now, in my letters to Texas, I have been teaching a Westernised meditation method called 'Autogenics' (www.autogenic-therapy.org.uk). I have adapted this therapy into a distant-learning course which the penfriend can work through gradually, giving me feedback on their progress by post. So each person learns how to enter a 'change-of-consciousness' state (or meditative state). This is very healing and means our spirits can be attuned to each other and with God.

Prisoners on death row come from a deprived or abusive background. They may not have access to spiritual help or religious knowledge. They may be very distressed, full of hate alternating with remorse. As a Quaker, I have an experiential faith so do not feel dogma or credal beliefs are necessary. My own beliefs have gradually evolved over the years from being 'sent' experiences or guidance for my spiritual journey. These are then 'discerned' in the stillness of a Quaker Meeting. I can, therefore, write simply to each penfriend just what I 'know' from experience (e.g. the Afterlife does exist because I've been there!). Gradually, through these postal conversations, remorse may be replaced by being able to forgive themselves and/or feel forgiven by God. Perhaps they may be able to make contact with their victims' families and even have their crimes understood and accepted.

Other experiences I have been able to share with each penfriend are of my having a background as a health professional and psychologist. In addition, I have studied a spiritual psychotherapy called 'Psychosynthesis'. This last links well with the Quaker concept of 'that of God' in everyone. This is because, in Psychosynthesis, one has a Higher Self (or inner divinity) or a Guide Within. Quakers, therefore, say that there are no evil people, only evil deeds (sometimes expressed as "love the sinner but not the sin"). Passing this belief on to a penfriend can be very freeing for them. Previously, they may only have met 'Hell and Damnation' beliefs and so felt they were beyond redemption.

I also help them to believe we each come with 'a Meaning and Purpose' from the Beforelife. So, if we have not been able to achieve this in this life, we may be able to work through it in the Afterlife (or even our next incarnation). I explain about being able to evolve and have a sort of 'therapy' in the Afterlife (see *'Testimony of Light'*) where we become sorted out and understand our *raison d'être*.

So all this I can pass on to each penfriend over several months or years. The cruel practice on death row of having frequent 'stays' (or postponements) of the execution date makes this possible. Therefore, gradually a penfriend can start to feel calmer and less fearful about what awaits him. They are already experiencing 'hell on earth' by being on death row so, maybe, now a 'heaven' is what awaits them. I help them to develop a belief in having a soul or spirit and thus being immortal. I write to them about our each having an eternal purpose and 'work' to do in the Afterlife which will put right their present unhappy life as a human on earth.

When I receive the date of a penfriend's execution, I am able to remind them that I will 'be there' – present with them. I can be spiritually/psychically present at their death (by lethal injection). I call it "holding their hand", which seems to be comforting. Yet, they understand it as not something physical. At the actual moment of death I am "holding them in the Light" and surrounding them with God's Love as I act as a conduit for the Holy Spirit. (I described how I was able to do this in an earthquake in the Autumn 2012 Quarterly Review). I have prepared them to see the traumatic, chaotic moment of the execution as, instead, a moment of stillness and peace, such as we have in a deeply gathered Quaker Meeting. So it is a time when they are meditating and I am meditating beside them. I believe they will be met by loved ones so they won't lose their way in the Afterlife but instead will arrive safely and be helped to settle in. I am able to reassure them about the 'Life Review'. This is because my own (during my NDE) was gentle and enlightening and not at all judgemental. So they will then understand how they can put things right and start to move on as spirit (i.e. evolve). They will also know that they will have help and companionship to do this.

A SHARD OF ETERNITY

By Liz Silk

To write of that shard of eternity within the breast is to contemplate 'other' matters. Mist evaporating in sunrise, water shaken from a dog's coat, firelight—all transitory glimpses of an inexpressible form, adding richness and significance to the day. The act of description obscures more than it reveals. The worm in the apple turns out to be life abounding and a cause for joy; sharing comes into this.

I am in my seventieth year. Just over half my life ago someone knocked on the clear plastic pane of my back door. I was loading the washing machine and didn't want distraction or the baby to be woken. There was no one there. Perhaps it was next door;

no one there either, no close neighbour on the other side. It came again and I recognised a tale from tradition and knew that I must welcome the 'stranger' if they brought peace and love—and that was that.

A few nights later, sometime during the deeps of sleep, I found myself in an octagonal room at the top of a high tower. The view was blue sky all around and a few white clouds. In the centre of the room, a great, old round table with an abundantly loaded fruit bowl. A man in monk's habit welcomed me warmly. He approached from the left, signifying a past relationship, and indeed he was familiar, but I don't know from where or when. All he said was, "*These unfinished tasks, they have a negative drag.*"

We had agreed to do something that I had forgotten, so I made no reply—and that was that.

Life pattered on for a few weeks. My youngest early walker didn't fall from window ledges or garden walls. The other two got on with sums, reading and playing horses in the street.

Once more during sleep—it never seems like dreaming—I became aware of floating, naked, at the farthest reaches of my consciousness, stars blazed all around, above and below and I drifted in measureless peace. Then I noticed movement far below and to one side, coming towards me very fast. It was a vast globe, composed of countless beings, increasing in brightness into the centre. I knew I could not look into that brilliant nucleus and shielded my eyes as the entity noticed me and sent out a wave of joy, love and recognition. It knew me and loved me and with great good humour changed course rather than obliterate me. That altered direction caught me in a cosmic wind, a flick of God's cloak, that spun me back into my bed. I was as winded as if I had done a handstand and landed on my back, and I rolled out of bed onto hands and knees, gasping. My husband wasn't too impressed by the commotion. I don't know whether I slept again that night—certainly I made tea and pondered. Perhaps the biggest comprehension was that God is not one but many, that this entity is, like us, a process, and it also aspires. It is not a final destination, but another beginning.

This was the start of an ongoing inner reality which still continues in a less dramatic way. It took a decade or so to establish a way of being that is akin to conversations with a dear friend. Usually the friend takes the lead, but will respond if asked in a firm voice. I cannot go against directions and am required to respond fairly promptly to urgings and I have found forms for those responses. Sometimes by painting, sometimes poetry or, as here, a written piece.

This mystery demands attending, as worker bees attend the queen, but defies concrete definition. I am less sure now of what it means than before all the 'dreams' began, except to say: mistrust finite explanations, it is larger than we can comprehend. It's the grounding that's important, attempting to make something that did not exist before, with this rarely captured 'oneness' at its core.

Winnowing Dreams

*The dream, shifting and oblique.
Vivid transparencies overlaid
slide and reform — elusive, sensory.
Grasped at as straws in a gale.
Deep, rusty velours billow.
Glimpse of a dark jewel's slow spark
off a cupped candle.
The bright jewel vanishes as diamond in water.
Some shard of eternity, piercing,
creating tragedies to redeem,
loving all harsh and bitter courses,
in tireless pursuit of release.
You say it can't be so, and I say:
Opinions are worthless, the wheel turns.
Turns and dreams a revolving dance,
in which we swirl hand over hand.*

.....

STRANGE EXPERIENCE

By Gill Lockett

Many years ago I was working as a nurse on a Neurology ward. Sadly we had many patients who were unconscious and who would not survive.

The layout of the ward was like a dumbbell with open areas at each end and a corridor of single rooms connecting them. The most seriously ill patients were kept in these side rooms. It was practice to check on these patients every half hour and when death was near the room was usually full of relatives. On one such day I was walking down the corridor to check on a man who was near to transition when I suddenly saw him walk out of the side room and disappear into thin air. Though he didn't look exactly solid I could see him quite clearly. I wasn't fazed by this sight as I have always had a strong belief in life after death. I carried on walking to the room and entered. As I did it was obvious that this man was no longer with us. I believe that I saw his soul depart though I never said anything to his relatives as I was unsure as to how they would react. However, some of my colleagues weren't in the least bit surprised!

SAVED BY AN ANGEL

By Christine Simmons

This article was first published in the monthly magazine *Psychic News*.

I'd like to share this story of an Indian lady known to me. I'll call her Rani (not her real name). Rani was very unhappy in her marriage. Her husband's cruelty extended to sending their son to another part of India to be brought up in a boarding school – which, it later transpired, was a 'school' in name only – and Rani was not permitted to visit her son.

One day Rani resolved to leave her husband and start a new life. This was an extreme solution for a woman trapped in a traditional Indian marriage. What made it even more difficult and dangerous was Rani's decision to take her son with her.

Rani's plan was to travel to the school and request a meeting with her son. She hoped that this might present an opportunity for her to take her son away. Rani was well aware that although she was the boy's mother, as a woman she had no authority even to request a meeting. As Rani expected, when she met with the school principal, he brushed aside her pleadings brusquely. As Rani was being dismissed, and while she was wondering what to do next, the principal suddenly and unexpectedly seemed to have a change of heart, and permitted her to take her son out of school for two hours.

When Rani's son was brought to her, she saw that he was underweight from being ill-fed, was poorly dressed in thin clothes and had no shoes for his feet. Once outside the school, the pair ran along roads and tracks to the nearest town. They joined the queue for a bus to Rani's chosen destination, a 'safe house' belonging to a distant relative. Rani had very little money, but she planned to travel by bus as far as the money would take them, then to complete the journey on foot.

As they waited in the bus queue, Rani was extremely anxious in case her ploy had already been discovered. Then a woman appeared by Rani's side, and said "At a time like this, you need money", and the woman pressed something into Rani's hands. Rani glanced down in astonishment to see money in her hands. When Rani looked up again, the woman had vanished. Rani looked all around but the woman was not in the bus queue nor anywhere nearby. She had simply disappeared. Examining the money again, Rani saw that the cash was not just sufficient for the bus, but was a very large sum of money.

Rani did not stay long at the safe house. She knew that her husband would be very angry and would come looking for her. Rani feared for her life. As Rani was educated and had qualifications, she was able to obtain a visa entitling her to live and work in Britain. The money she had been given was enough to pay for her visa and flight to England and other necessary expenses. Rani made arrangements for her son to be well looked after in her temporary absence.

It was several years before it was reported back to Rani that her husband had given up looking for her, and it was safe to return to India. In the meantime, Rani had been able to save a lot more money towards the future, for herself and her son.

To this day, Rani believes that it was intervention from the Spirit world which influenced the principal to change his mind and allow her to take her son from the school. Rani is also convinced that the woman at the bus stop was in fact an 'angel' who had taken human form to help her in her hour of great need.

.....
*"I swear I think there is nothing but immortality!
That the exquisite scheme is for it, and the nebulous float is for it,
and the cohering is for it,
And all preparation is for it...and identity is for it...and life and death are
for it."*

Walt Whitman

AFTERLIFE'S ENTRY IS EARTH'S EXIT

By Elizabeth Angas

On Saturday night (17.5.14) I was suddenly woken by this dramatic 'vision' where I saw three of the four missing sailors departing for Heaven. The search for them had been called off (although was re-started the next day - Sunday). I saw them 'whooshing' to heaven in the way that emails 'whoosh' from my Apple Mac. It seems I was being 'taught' that our Exit is the same as our Arrival? Also, I have always been puzzled that I didn't experience 'the tunnel' in my own NDE, but 'just arrived' as these sailors apparently did also.

EMA

*They went with a whoosh, email-like souls going to Heaven
Slicing their way through stormy seas, then sheer rocks
before winging it in the chaotic sky - so fast
that I wasn't sure what I was seeing
Perhaps not 'a Precognition' but rather 'a Now' ?
Puzzling that there were only three?
Had the fourth sailor gone earlier, or will he go later - meanwhile
a soul who has lost his way?*

cont.

*Those three, probably did not realise their entry.
Did not realise it was through that tunnel.
I, too, had found myself 'just arriving', after my NDE exit from our Earth
as that also, was 'a whoosh'.
But then, all are embraced in Light and Love and Stillness -
the welcome of the Divine Presence.*

*So, its good there is no time for a decision as its instantaneous discernment.
time for dallying, for hovering
For, when 'the veil is thin', it facilitates the whoosh - the certainty.
Thus leaving the Earth and arriving in Heaven
is the same moment, the same non-place.*



A CONVERSATION BETWEEN UNBORN TWINS CONCERNING THEIR AFTERLIFE. Contributed by Eleonore Bruyere-Cordin

Baby 1: 'And you, do you believe that there is a life after birth?'

Baby 2: 'Yes of course, it is obvious to me that a life after birth does exist. For now we live here in Uterus so that we can grow and become strong to prepare ourselves for what awaits us after birth.'

Baby 1: 'But this makes no sense whatsoever to me, there is absolutely nothing after birth and anyway what would life look like after birth? Tell me that if you can!'

Baby 2: 'Well, I have heard that there is such a lot going on 'on the other side'. I heard that there is light out there and things called joys and emotions of all kinds. There are also a million things to learn and to do and new experiences that we will have to master, like for example, it seems that 'on the other side' we will eat with our mouths!'

Baby 1: 'Oh that is just nonsense! We have a perfectly good umbilical tube to eat and anyway no one has ever come back to Uterus to tell us what happens after birth have they so really all of what you are saying is just silly beyond words. Nothing happens after birth. You just must accept this as a fact.'

Baby 2: 'Well, I don't agree with you on this. It is true that I do not know exactly what our life will be like after birth No one can actually prove anything but I like to believe that in our life to come we will see our mother and she will take care of us and guide us.'

Baby 1: 'What! Do you mean to tell me that without ever having seen a 'mother' you actually believe that she exists? And if she exists, where is she? Can you see her, have you ever seen her?'

Baby 2: 'But just think of it for a moment will you. She is everywhere around us! We live in her. Thanks to her we are alive. Without her we would not be here at all. Can't you see that?'

Baby 1: 'This is just so silly, I have never seen a 'mother' so obviously she cannot exist!'

Baby 2: 'No I do not agree with you on this at all. Sometimes when everything around us is calm I can hear her speaking or singing. I cannot see her either but there are times when I can feel her presence when she caresses our world. Don't get me wrong I am very comfortable and content here but I cannot help thinking that our real life will start after birth and that once we are 'on the other side' a whole new world will welcome us...'



THOUGHTS ON THE NDE PHENOMENON

By Neil Crabtree

Friends who follow developments around the Near Death Experience (NDE) will possibly be aware that these are interesting times in this field. At Southampton hospital Dr Sam Parnia is running the Horizon project which specifically researches NDEs, and at Morrision and Singleton hospitals Dr Penny Sartori has completed a PhD on her observations of patients who have nearly died. Both have written ground-breaking books on this phenomenon which describe how the NDE can occur when patients are unconscious and close to death and where they report a set of components; in particular moving along a tunnel, meeting dead loved ones and experiencing a loving light.

Despite all the research into the NDE taking place in the secular field of medicine, it is surprising how much religious terminology is used, especially around the loving light. This is often referred to by people who experience it as being God, which should be of no surprise to Friends with their belief that there is that of God in everyone.

It is my opinion that Friends need to seriously monitor developments in this field as it is already being misused by extremist groups. In America, for example, some right-wing Christian fundamentalists are distorting findings to support their belief in an angry, white, male God. One train of thought being peddled is that everyone encounters a 'hellish' experience which, while a small minority of people do, is patently untrue.

Imagine if, in these dangerous times, the idea of a loving God grasped the public mind. On the other hand, imagine if it was successfully incorporated into the propaganda of reactionary and warlike forces – it could take centuries before an opportunity like this presents itself again.

A review of one of Penny Sartori's books is below under Book Reviews

BOOK REVIEWS

'THE WISDOM OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES'

BY DR PENNY SARTORI - WATKINS PUBLISHING LONDON (2014) -

Published by O Books in 2011. ISBN – 978 1 84694 467 3 (Price £12.99)

Reviewed by Maggie Jeffery

Penny Sartori was a nurse who worked in the Critical Care Department of a hospital for seventeen years. In the introduction of this book, she describes how very early in her career she was profoundly moved when a man in great distress and pain was resuscitated and kept alive although it was clearly his wish to be allowed to die. She was so upset that she nearly gave up nursing at that time. Fortunately instead of leaving she chose to look for further training to improve her care skills so that she could help the dying.

Although there was no training available in this area specifically for Critical Care Nurses, she began to hear about Near-Death Experiences (NDE) and after some difficulty was given permission by the hospital authorities to begin the UK's first long-term prospective study on NDE's under the supervision of Professor Paul Badham and Dr Peter Fenwick. After five years of research, the Clinical Study, *'The Near-Death Experiences of Hospitalized Intensive-Care Patients'* was published and she was awarded a PhD for her work.

In the book she describes accounts from a wide variety of patients who have clinically 'died' exploring many aspects such as childhood NDE's, the effects of different cultures and 'Out of Body Experiences'; not all experiences were the same. She discusses how sometimes senses were described as being heightened – "realer than real". There is a chapter on the medicalization of Death. Death and Birth are sacred events in our life journey and the environment in which they occur and the dignity and sanctity with which they are attended are of fundamental importance.

Common experiences such as that of the Tunnel, Life Review and a Presence or 'Being of Light' are explored as well as feelings of unity, time distortion, a point of no return and being sent back. While of course these are not the objective 'proof' demanded by certain forms of research, these accounts have been carefully recorded, compared and while not all the same by any means, I found the similarities in many of these reports striking.

Too many people live and die in fear as a result of the old mechanistic mind-set that suggests that existence ceases with the death of the body. Yet Quantum Science tells us that underpinning all life is energy and of course energy is transformative. Is

humanity not caught currently between very different two worldviews? The beginning of the Chapter, *'Implications for a Greater Understanding and Acknowledgement of NDE's'*, begins with a quote by Raphael Kellman (2004): *"Western medicine itself, with all its materialist focus on the body and its insistence in ignoring the spirit, is literally making us sick – and then it is virtually impossible for us to heal."*

The Conclusion and Epilogue were both thoughtful and thought provoking and indeed the author writes throughout in an easy and very readable style and her integrity shines through the pages. By raising awareness of NDE's in this book, Penny Sartori offers a great service which challenges the cultural taboo on the subject of death.

'CONSCIOUSNESS BEYOND LIFE. THE SCIENCE OF THE NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE'

BY PIM VAN LOMMEL - HARPERONE, NEW YORK, 2010

Reviewed by Jan Arriens

Pim van Lommel is a Dutch cardiologist who in 2007 published a remarkable book which appeared three years later in English translation as *Consciousness Beyond Life*. While I would not in any way regard myself as an expert, I do find this field of great interest and have read fairly widely on the subject. To me, this is the best book on the subject, by a considerable margin.

Van Lommel's views are a notable attempt to speculate how the borders of scientific understanding might be pushed forward in order to take account of phenomena for which there is currently no explanation, and which tend therefore to be denied or derided. His challenging speculations arose out of his work as a cardiologist with patients who had suffered near death experiences. Having originally been highly sceptical about such experiences, as these did not fit within the conventional medical paradigm, he was forced to the conclusion that the evidence was incontrovertible. The experiences were consistent in nature and were associated with a variety of medical conditions, so that it was impossible to assign any one underlying physiological cause. These kinds of experiences could also arise in the absence of any physiological change, e.g. in the case in the moments leading up to an imminent accident. Maybe, it could be argued, that the shock of anticipating such an event does in fact trigger physiological processes at very high speed, but there are also cases where people have mystical experiences while doing nothing out of the ordinary. Thus we have a striking commonality of experience set against very different physiological backgrounds, ranging from cardiac arrests and other close encounters with death, such as drowning and complicated childbirths, to operations, sudden high-risk situations, meditative states and states of total normality.

Van Lommel describes this as follows:

I developed the following views in response to the commonly reported experiences of

an enhanced consciousness during a cardiac arrest. This enhanced consciousness features nonlocal aspects of interconnectedness, such as memories from earliest childhood up until the crisis that caused the NDE [near-death experience] and sometimes even visions of the future. It offers the chance of communication with the thoughts and feelings of people who were involved in past events or with the consciousness of deceased friends and relatives. This experience of consciousness can be coupled with a sense of unconditional love and acceptance while people can also have contact with a form of ultimate and universal knowledge and wisdom.

In this new approach, complete and endless consciousness with retrievable memories has its origins in a nonlocal space in the form of indestructible and not directly observable wave functions. These wave functions, which store all aspects of consciousness in the form of information, are always present in and around the body (nonlocally). The brain and the body merely function as a relay station receiving part of the overall consciousness and part of our memories in our waking consciousness in the form of measurable and constantly changing electromagnetic fields. In this view, these electromagnetic fields of the brain are not the cause but rather the effect or consequence of endless consciousness.

In quantum mechanics, observation is said to "collapse" the wave function. The observer affects what is observed. Taking this to the level of consciousness, it has been postulated that consciousness may be based on wave functions extending beyond the individual that are not bound by either time or space. As Pim van Lommel puts it, "Consciousness triggers collapse of the wave function and is thus the source of embodied waking consciousness".

Some would no doubt object that this is an extrapolation too far from quantum mechanics and nothing more than pseudo-science. Van Lommel has indeed been accused of just this. Quantum mechanics applies at the subatomic level and cannot simply be scaled up. At what level does consciousness cause the collapse of the wave function? How does it do this? And is it not a circular argument to say that consciousness, by collapsing the wave function, is the source of waking consciousness? What kind of consciousness are we talking about here?

While Van Lommel's approach may raise as many questions as it answers, it is a brave and indeed pioneering attempt to marry up empirical data – no matter how confounding – with contemporary scientific theories concerning the nature of matter and consciousness. Van Lommel has very little to say about survival beyond death, except to make it clear that the most extraordinary forms of communication are possible in NDEs in a way that challenges our very understanding of what consciousness means.



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