

THE QUIET WORD



Up and Coming Events

Sunday Meeting for Worship 10:45 at all Leeds Meetings with exception of Ilkley which is at 10:30am and fortnightly house Meetings at Otley Otley:

Visitors at our Meetings are most welcome.

If you have any difficulties about finding the venue please telephone David Robson on **0113 318 8084**

Tuesday June 11th Bradford Interfaith Prayer for Peace 7pm: On the 11th of each month at the Khidmat Centre, Spencer Road, Bradford BD7 2EU

Tuesday June 11th Introduction to Buddhism 7pm – 9.15pm: 4 week course £35/£18 at Leeds Buddhist Centre, 4th Floor, Bridge House, Hunslet LS10 1JN

enquiries@leedsbuddhistcentre.org

Wednesday June 12th Discovery – 3 Faiths Course 7.30pm: Judaism at Sinai Synagogue, Roman Avenue LS8 2AN. The event is hosted by faith communities and free but for catering purposes please contact jane.abramson@yahoo.co.uk or ring Leeds Concord secretary on 01924 863956 to book your place.

Friday 15th June 11.30 am: Quaker Wedding of Jared West and Lorne Wolf at Carlton Hill

Sunday 16th June – memorial Meeting for Worship in memory of Elizabeth Hulland.

10.45am at Carlton Hill

Monday June 17th Loving you, loving me: 8.15pm (Concord Event)

A new series of talks on Ethics and Morals, starting with Rabbi Daniel Levy ‘Exploring the concept of self-transcendence in Judaism’ at UHC Synagogue, Shadwell Lane. A free event but booking essential. Contact Simon 079 313 70791 simonphillips90@hotmail.com

Saturday 29th June – Kindlers Workshop at Carlton Hill (see details)

Saturday 6th Bradford Faith Trail 10.30am – 3.45pm:

10.30am St Peter's Church, 651 Leeds Road BD3 8EL

11.30am Shree Lakshmi Narayan Hindu Temple, 321 Leeds Road BD3 9LS

12.30pm Abu Bakar Masjid, 38 Steadman Terrace BD3 9ND

1.30pm Guru Gobind Singh Ji Gurdwara, Off Leeds Road BD3 9JN (lunch stop)

3pm Bradford Cathedral, 1 Stott Hill, BD1 4EH

Sunday June 30th Awakening the dreamer – bringing vision to life 10am – 4pm: Free day workshop with Brahma Kumaris. Tel: 0113 2757727E-mail: leeds@uk.bkwsu.org

Sunday June 30th Mosque Open Day 2pm – 6pm: Bouncy castle, food and stalls at Jamia Masjid Ghousis, Armley Leeds 12. For more information contact Abdul Ghafoor Ratyal aratyal@gmail.com

Monday July 1st Luncheon Event 12noon – 2.30pm:

Meditation, prayer, community meal and seminar at Burngreave Ashram, 86 Spital Hill, Sheffield S4 7LG Register by e-mail curlsu@hotmail.com or phone 07932017929

Monday 1st Wakefield Interfaith Group - Initiation 6pm

Presentations by representatives of different faith communities in Wakefield on the topic of 'Initiation'. Education Centre, 8-10 Westmorland Street WF1 1PJ (behind Wakefield Cathedral). Please bring vegetarian food to share; tea and coffee provided. Contact Cynthia 01924 863956 cynthia9@phonecoop.coop 075863 27822

Tuesday July 9th Stories from the Minster 6pm (Concord)

Concord and Leeds Minster invite you to share vegetarian refreshments and enjoy a tour of the Minster to hear inspiring stories of people and features. A free event but booking essential for catering.

Please contact secretary@concord-leeds.org.uk **01924 863956** by June 28th

Saturday 13th Buddhism Today 10am – 4pm: Introducing Buddhism and Buddhist practice with Triratna Buddhist community, £35/£18 concs. Leeds Buddhist Centre, 4th Floor, Bridge House, Hunslet LS10 1JN enquiries@leedsbuddhistcentre.org

Sunday 14th July LAQM at Carlton Hill (see details)

Saturday 21st July LAQM Coach Outing to the National Arboretum.

Yearly Meeting - the view from Friends House



On the morning that Yearly Meeting began this year, I found myself walking around Friends House with a small troupe of staff members, checking that the building was ready for the 1,000-or-so Quakers due to arrive over the next few days. Floors had been hoovered, tables polished; chairs and tables set out; signs installed and flowers arranged. Catering provisions had been delivered, and the coffee machines were ready. Detailed plans had been drawn up, showing which meetings and interest groups would be held, when and where. The hospitality and events teams had prepared everything wonderfully.

By 10:30 catering and cleaning staff gathered for a briefing. 'Quakers see Friends House as their home' they heard. 'We all want to make them feel welcome, at home, and as comfortable as they can be. Let's treat them like family.' This is a side of Yearly Meeting that few Quakers see. I've been working at Friends House (as Deputy Recording Clerk) since January. For the first time, I experienced something of the huge task of preparing for Yearly Meeting. As I saw, it's a job that is done with attention, and genuine care. Quakers had been arriving in ones, twos and small groups all week, but on Friday they began to appear in earnest. Smiles, handshakes, hugs and questions: and then a roomful of people settling down to a weekend of worship and shared discernment. Personally, I hadn't been given many jobs to do in advance; but I was busy most of the weekend, helping colleagues, answer questions and meet Quakers from all over Britain (and further afield). At one stage there was flurry as we worked to compile an up-to-date list of members of Meeting for Sufferings. I was sorry not to have more time with Friends from Leeds, but it was always good to see faces I knew (and there were a good number of us there). I did have the daunting task of urging Friends to turn off their mobile phones just before the start of each session. It wasn't a hugely successful strategy: I heard phones go off in six of the seven sessions that started this way. But I have to admit it was fun to look out from the stage and moving to see everyone gather together into stillness. One morning I visited most of the children and young people's groups – another part of Yearly Meeting that needs a lot of preparation, and hard work from staff and volunteers. Frankly, they were probably having more fun than most of us - drawing, painting, story-telling, playing in the park, eating chocolate - and being Quakers in more formal ways: worshipping, sharing silence, discerning, agreeing minutes.

But above all I spent time in sessions, participating in worship and sharing the process of discernment. From a staff point of view this felt like a wonderful Yearly Meeting - centred, calm, purposeful and loving. We came away with a powerful sense that we really are in this together - that whatever our role, Friends and the staff who support Britain Yearly Meeting are genuinely trying to support and sustain Quaker way. Back at work on Tuesday morning I saw delegates arriving for another conference, organised by a non-Quaker group. The floors were hoovered, tables polished, chairs and tables set out. Hospitality staff had been hard at work again and the building was back to 'normal'; but of course YM remains with the staff. We're busily following up decisions and discussions, and looking forward to the year ahead.

Juliet Prager

**AMNESTY CONCERTS AT RAWDON (free, donations for
Amnesty International)**



The Threedom Reed Trio ~ Sunday 23 June at 7.30pm

We welcome back to our series **Elizabeth Kenwood (oboe)**, who will be joined by **John Mellor (clarinet)** and **David Baker (bassoon)**, both from Opera North, to offer us the rare chance of enjoying music from 20th-century France by Françaix, Ibert, Milhaud and Poulenc. The pieces are described as melodic, expressive and sometimes ethereal, with ample opportunity for virtuoso display.

The Taming of the Shrew ~ Sunday 14 July at 7.30pm

Theatre of the Dales will tantalize us with this Shakespearean take on the battle of the sexes. Weather permitting; it will happen on our lawn. Some seating will be available, but you are welcome to bring a cushion, blanket, or deck chair. Dress warmly!

Ilias Devetzoglou and Miaoyin Qu ~ Sunday 28 July at 7.30pm

This outstanding violin and piano duo returns to play pieces by some of the greatest German composers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Beethoven, Brahms and Mendelssohn.

Arioso ~ Saturday 21 September at 7.30pm

We welcome another exciting and imaginative programme of early music, this time linked to the spectacular court of the Sun King, Louis XIV, providing a wide range of textures and

styles, which will appeal to a general audience as well as to lovers of period performance.

Juliet Welchman and Annette Saunders – Sunday 6 October at 7.30pm

We are wholly delighted to be able to feature once more this superb cello and piano duo, whose sublime technical mastery and sensitive interaction go to the heart of whatever music they play.

Under Milk Wood ~ Saturday 19 October at 7.30pm

Two well-loved theatrical companies, **Trio Literati** and **Theatre of the Dales**, join forces to perform this classic play for voices by Dylan Thomas.

Ristretto~ Sunday 10 November at 7.30pm

Colin Honour (clarinet) and friends from Opera North **Bibi Heal** (soprano), **Liz Wyly** (viola) and **Martin Pickard** (piano) will lift our hearts as always with music, both light and serious, familiar and unfamiliar.

Bradford Music Club ~ Sunday 15 December at 7.30pm

Members of the **Bradford Music Club** continue their tradition of inviting us to share their last meeting of the year in aid of Amnesty. Come and hear their talented music-making. You might even be tempted to join the Club!

[Further information from Barbara Parry \(0113 2503867\) or Diane Exley \(0113 2502051\)](#)

I Was Not There

‘Both my parents died in camps, I was not there to comfort them, I was not there, they were alone’. These poignant and anguished lines from a poem by Karen Gershon summarise beyond all measure the situation thrust upon Karen and her sister Lise when in December 1938 they were sent in the second wave of Jewish children to England. This was organised by the British Committee for Child Transport, known ever afterwards as the *kinder transport*. Karen Gershon, the poet, was born Kaethe Lowenthal in 1923 in Bielefeld, Germany. Her subsequent life in the UK after 1938, with all its loneliness, privations and difficulties, is the basis of the play “Karen’s Way” by Vanessa Rosenthal. This play presented on Sunday 26 May by Yellow Leaf Theatre, directed by Chris Wilkinson, was the first of Rawdon Quaker Meeting’s Amnesty Concert Series 2013, its 22nd season. The play shows us Karen as an older woman reminiscing with her younger self, vividly acted by Vanessa Rosenthal and Francesca Larkin respectively. The audience’s emotional response is enhanced by the haunting selection of music, chosen and played by Marion Raper - piano - and David Riley – violin. This was a well-attended and splendid start to the Amnesty Season. [The next Concert is Sunday 23 June](#) given by the Threedom Reed Trio.

[Ben Francis](#)

Quakers welcome Marriage Bill vote



Legislation to allow same-sex couples to marry in England and Wales took another step forward today, (Tuesday, 4 June). Quakers in Britain welcomed the vote to pass the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill at Second Reading in the House of Lords. One peer described it as “one historic step towards a better world”.

Crossbench peer [Lord Dear](#), put forward an amendment to prevent the legislation getting a second reading. The number of those content (and supporting his amendment) were 148 and those not content (and against his amendment and for the Bill going on) were 390. The Bill goes on to committee stage.

[Juliet Prager, Deputy Recording Clerk of Quakers in Britain](#) said: “A change in law to allow same-sex couples to marry will bring real joy to couples we know who say a civil partnership lacks spiritual expression. We welcome the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Bill because it is right for us; it will enrich marriage, and it will not be imposed on other faith bodies who do not yet share our view.”

“Quakers see God in everyone,” she continued. “We decided in 2009 to seek a change in the law to allow same-sex couples to marry within our worshipping communities. We’ve been waiting for the law to catch up.” Quakers have been considering sexuality for fifty years.

According to Hansard, during the two-day debate, Baroness Brinton said: “The Quakers, as ever, set the pace on this. In 1963, in their paper, *Towards a Quaker View of Sex*, they said: ‘Surely it is the nature and quality of a relationship that matters; one must not judge by its outward appearance but by its inner worth ... We see no reason why the physical nature of a sexual act should be the criterion by which the question whether or not it is moral should be decided. An act which expresses true affection between two individuals and gives pleasure to them both, does not seem to us to be sinful by reason alone of the fact that it is homosexual.’”

She continued, “Quakers see God in everyone, and all commitments to relationships as of equal worth. So I am pleased that the Quakers have said publicly that they will opt into the registration arrangements and carry out equal marriage with enthusiasm.”

The Bill passed through the Commons in a free vote with a 205 majority after 366 MPs voted in favour, with 161 MPs voting against. Follow Quaker support for same-sex marriage on www.quaker.org.uk/equal-marriage

My thoughts from BYM 2013



I felt pretty blessed last weekend attending BYM - the warm glow of the sun was matched by the warming glow that comes from being surrounded by so many friendly faces, an increasing number of which are becoming familiar to me and I find it so nurturing to have many friends of all generations from years of various Quaker activities.

The theme was around trust in the spirit - developing the theme of 'what it means to be a Quaker today', with a particular focus on discernment. As a [non-theist Quaker](#), the area of discernment is something I've often contemplated, troubled mainly by the semantics and terminology as usual. I found the ministry helpful and was particularly glad to have attended a special interest group session run by the non-theist Quaker network in which we discussed this further. These special interest group sessions are a particular highlight of the yearly meeting and it's particularly warming to see the relief of a Friend who belongs to a meeting in which she is the only non-theist and found it highly reassuring to see a room full of others and that she is not alone. It is the translation of particularly Christian-loaded words and the understanding that 'God's word' may just be the Truth (with the capital T) or the 'best way forward' - whatever discernment is, I enjoy the feeling of leaving a meeting with an answer which is not directly what anyone was expecting and the trust in the feeling of the meeting is a demonstration of the power of the meeting being greater than the sum of the parts.

I attended three sessions inspired by (or in line with) our commitment to becoming a low carbon, sustainably community - looking up at the work being done at a national and international level, looking down at what actions we can do and what effect different life choices make and looking inwards at ourselves, and others, and considering how to ask the difficult questions. The first session was led with the premise that personal action is made easier when we are engaged in large scale action and vice-versa. There were three speakers, from [QUNO \(Quaker United Nations Office\)](#), [the Quaker Council for European Affairs](#) and from [QuakerPeace and Social Witness \(QPSW\)](#). They talked of inspiring and worthwhile work being done at these international levels, creating dialogue at climate negotiations between diplomats in countries who usually have no opportunity to talk informally, and of efforts to ingrain a concern for sustainability into European policies alongside the imperatives for 'growth' and job creation. They asked us for continued support,

upholding them spiritually through their challenging work and financially as their work is only possible if they can continue to have the financial support from BYM.

The third session addressed an issue I find particularly challenging; so often when we try to talk to people about the impacts that our lifestyles are having, we face barriers that prevent us from even having the conversations. We were paired up with someone we hadn't yet met and were given some topics to talk over: why do we fly, own a car, eat meat, bank unethically, buy from high street shops etc; the conversations that are not easily addresses in a 15minute chat. I was aware of un-ease in my partner and felt the shutters had already come up. However, my partner was a relationship counsellor, and we spent the time discussing the challenges that feelings of guilt and shame present in opening up important discussions and how sometimes one of the people involved may not even perceive there to be a problem, and how these barriers are dealt with. She said that within her work, guilt can put such a block on discussion that it's imperative to work through this so that the issues can be brought to the table. I believe the same is necessary with these issues of lifestyle choice and movement to more sustainable living.

People often tell me that my engineering background is really useful for working in this area but my view is that the insight from those with a strong understanding of people is what we really need. I could go on and talk about the interest I had in the [Swarthmore Lecture](#), hearing about the spiritual journey of another Friend which is very different from my own thus far, the joy of the group singing, the inspirational exhibition of stories from African peace makers...but I'll stop there. BYM is about so much more than the business of the society, it's a chance to see and feel the community, to find out what other Friends are doing in the name of their Quakerism and although I left feeling emotionally worn out, I feel spiritually recharged. I'm already looking forward to a full year's Yearly Meeting gathering in Bath next summer.

[Rici Marshall](#)

LAQM Sunday July 14th 1.15pm

All members and attenders are invited to Leeds Area Quaker Meeting at Carlton Hill
Quaker Meeting House

10.45 Meeting for Worship followed by 12.30 Lunch (bring food to share)



Three homeless men sleeping rough at Carlton Hill

1.30pm Workshop: Homelessness in Leeds

1.15pm hear about Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM) 3pm Tea Break followed by 3.15pm
Business as led, then 4.15pm Tea and birthday cake!

To arrange childcare please contact rhiannon.bookgeek@gmail.com

Everyone is invited to Robert Keeble's 50th Birthday Tea at 4:15pm !

LAQM Sunday July 14th 1.15pm

All members and attenders are invited to Leeds Area Quaker Meeting at Carlton Hill
Quaker Meeting House

BYM – a sad farewell!



I really like attending Britain Yearly Meeting – the only trouble is it that it can be too much of a good thing. I am fortunate in that I am able to stay with an aunt in Stoke Newington and I particularly enjoyed the experience of travelling on the 73 bus to Friends House which now feels like a ‘home from home’. The Quaker Centre at Friends House was my first destination as I had a box of Quaker Books to return to the bookshop. The place was packed with Quakers from all parts of the country and although I knew many by sight, I am not so good at names so it is good that we are all required to wear name badges.

On the Saturday morning I volunteered as a microphone steward up in one of the balconies but there was little call for my services - with such a large gathering, not everyone was called to speak by the clerks and it was clear to me that if you were standing to speak in the balconies, the prospect of being called appeared to be slim. During the lunch period I attended a special interest group that looked at the work of [QUNO – the Quaker United Nations Office](#), this was very interesting. In the afternoon I volunteered as a doorkeeper on one of the main doors and with just over 900 attending that meant a lot of hand shaking and greeting at the door. Incidentally, Leeds was particularly well represented with 16 friends attending from Carlton Hill meeting alone and many friends from the other Leeds meetings. I did stay for the Swarthmore Lecture in the evening but to be honest, I will have to read the book as I was too tired to keep fully alert during the lecture. On Sunday I had ‘day off’ and had a wonderful time helping to get my aunts garden ready for the summer, so when I arrived for the final day on the Monday, I was fully refreshed. The final session was a very sad one for a great number of us as we were holding Meeting for Worship in the Large Meeting Room for the last time before it is to be refurbished and transformed into a light modern conference centre.

The historic Art Deco oak panelling is to go, movable seating installed and a huge sky light will be fitted to the ceiling. The room will be transformed into a fantastic resource for the many different groups that use the building, but for holding our BYM, it is clear that the present format – a purpose built Meeting Room for 1100 people, is probably the best format.

When I was younger I attended Yearly Meeting with my Grandparents and I remember that the oak panelling had an almost magical 'golden' tone to it, but now it has darkened with age and the room looks tiered and ready for something new, but it was a sad moment to shake hands at the end of the gathering – it felt like I was saying goodbye to my grandparents. On returning to Leeds I have suffered my normal 'post BYM blues' and that's the trouble with BYM, it's simply too good an experience, you simply don't want it to end, but at the same time it is emotionally draining. The next BYM will be a weeklong residential gathering in the summer on 2014 taking place at the campus of Bath university - roll on 2014!

Robert Keeble

Fruits of the Spirit:

GRATITUDE AND JOY.

(From the Kindlers)

Carlton Hill Quaker Meeting House,
188 Woodhouse Lane, Leeds, LS2 9DX
Saturday 29TH June 2013

10.00 tea and biscuits for 10.30am prompt start finishing at 4.30 pm with tea. You are invited to bring your own packed lunch and something to share - coffee/tea provided. **Led by Margaret Calvert & Michael Hennessey of the Kindlers' team**

Our work together will be participatory, including inputs, group-work, dialogue and discussion within a framework of worship. We shall explore -

* What is GRATITUDE - a prime enlarger of Spirit, an essential element of faith?
But is being grateful being subservient; is life just to be, to live abundantly?
How can we keep affirming that all life is gift - a receiving and a giving?

* Is JOY a grace? What is its relationship to pleasure and happiness?
Let's make Quaker worship more joyous, with adoration and thanksgiving.
How can our meetings be joyful communities, when we are so earnest?

The workshop is for a maximum of 24 participants. Please give name & address to: Betsy Randolph-Horn, 23 Spencer Place, Leeds, LS7 4DQ
tel. 0113.229.7546 or email: betzrh@ntlworld.com

£5.00 per participant.

The Kindlers in worship and witness. In this, local and area meetings are encouraged to experiment with new ways of deepening Quaker worship together and witnessing to the world. Kindlers' publications and literature will be on sale at the workshop.

Some Thoughts from the Editor: Paradise Around Every Corner



"Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these" [\[Luke 12:27\]](#).

In the midst of the minutiae of Quaker living it is sometimes easy to forget why we *belong*. Why do we sit on that steering-group? Why do we work on this or that committee? Why indeed do we come to Meeting at all? To answer these questions it is sometimes helpful to consider the reasons early Friends gave for their commitment. This doesn't mean of course that we sceptical moderns have to passively adopt their answers yet by peeling back the centuries we might be able to clarify our own motives more clearly. For the likes of [George Fox](#) and [James Naylor](#), the basis of their outward dedication was inseparable from their inward experience. They saw Quakerism primarily as a vehicle of illumination, discipleship and transformation. To be a Quaker (at least according to Fox and Naylor) meant living on that awkward threshold between earth and heaven, between the reality of imperfection and the anticipation of restoration. While the Scriptures taught that the entrance to an earthly Paradise was forever barred on account of the fall [Genesis 3:24] early Quakers saw their devotion to the inward Christ as a means of returning themselves to a state of perfection. As Fox tells us in his [Journal](#):

Now I was come up in spirit through the flaming sword, into the paradise of God. All things were new; and all the creation gave unto me another smell than before, beyond what words can utter. I knew nothing but pureness, and innocence, and righteousness; being renewed into the image of God by Christ Jesus, to the state of Adam, which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me; and it was showed me how all things had their names given them according to their nature and virtue.

As the above passage brilliantly illustrates, Fox did not limit the original bliss of Eden to some ethereal after-world. On the contrary, he understood Paradise as a living reality-accessible to all those who communed with the Light. This conviction encouraged many early

Friends to believe (to the revulsion of both Calvinists and Catholics alike) that it was possible to live wholly without sin. Those brave and radical Friends who went 'naked as a sign' did so as a stunning expression of their regenerated nature. While the fallen couple were said to feel shame at the comprehension their nakedness, those who accepted the Inward Teacher lived according to a new law of divine grace. For such Friends, Heaven was not a 'pie-in-the-sky' abstraction, but rather a daily reality. While many modern Quakers might be left perplexed by the peculiarity of such theological claims, I suggest that Fox's mystical message is still relevant for us today.

His essential point to us is that God is not separate from the world in which we live; the Spirit is always with us if we care to listen. This means that we don't need to wait until our death-bed to experience God's Kingdom. If we conquer the pernicious fantasy that we are somehow separate from the forces of Love and Truth, then we can witness the work of the Spirit here and now. Such an alteration of perception may well take an entire life-time to attain, yet this is the ultimate and sure goal of the Quaker Way. No-one gives better voice to this spiritual practice than the Zen Master [Thich Nhat Hanh](#). Encouraging us to see Heaven more as a state of mind and less as a future destination, Hanh reflects:

If you walk [with conscious intention]... the energy of mindfulness and concentration will be there to support you. And the place where you walk becomes the pure land of the Buddha or the kingdom of God. The blue sky, the beautiful vegetation, the face of a child, the flower blooming -- all these wonders belong to the kingdom of God, to the pure land of the Buddha.

So how does all this help us to better belong? Undoubtedly, it is easy to be a Quaker when we're on a 'spiritual high' - when our relationships are strong, or when the character of our Meeting is soulful and vibrant. Yet, what happens when you feel overburdened, angry or dissatisfied with Meeting? What do you do when you feel weighed down with guilt brought on by 'not contributing enough'? Or perhaps you resent contributing too much. This is where Fox's insistence on the *blissful present* comes in handy.

When your religious life seems dead or your service burdensome, try to see both your Meeting-life and your spiritual journey as a small contribution to realizing Heaven on earth. As romantic as this may sound, such a sacred intention can protect our Quakerism from becoming mechanical or insincere. By seeing glimmers of divine light in making the tea, convening Children's Committee or participating in Meeting for Business, we insulate ourselves from the temptation of merely 'going through the motions'. Our work is suddenly placed in a larger and more evocative frame. Quakerism without a sense of Paradise, can only aspire to a philanthropic humanism, preoccupied with its own institutional survival. It is only when our communal life touches upon that which is eternal and beautiful that our structures are capable of serving more than the Meeting.

By placing our trust in the reality of 'Heaven here and now', we can hold fast to the Quaker Way, not because we want to preserve our community for the sake of it, but because we believe that a better world is possible. [Lesson 101 of Quakerism](#) is not

efficiency or even orderliness, but our willingness to live out God's delight in our everyday lives. This is what the image of Paradise is really all about for Fox. Building Eden should be the bedrock of all our discernment. If we obscure from view the agreeable promise of the garden through red-tape and routine, then we have lost sight of the purpose of Quaker practices. So when service weighs heavily upon you it is probably a good idea to ask yourself: 'Where is the delight in this practice? Where is the bliss in this decision?' If the answer comes back as negative start looking for Paradise behind the mundane. If your Quaker journey has lost its vivacity, remember the paradigm of the garden. Before searching for 'things to do' or 'things to refuse to do', seek out the wellsprings of relaxation, fellowship and recuperation before all else. Only by finding the tranquillity of Paradise within ourselves, can we hope to build a more peaceful world.

Ben Wood

Epistle from Britain Yearly Meeting held at Friends House, London on 24 – 27 May 2013

To all Friends everywhere,

We send you our loving greetings as we come to the end of our Yearly Meeting. We have gathered as a community of Friends of all ages, in worship, reflection, and relaxation. In our opening session, we were inspired by responses from Friends throughout Britain to queries about discernment; we now write to Friends throughout the world to share our explorations.

"Trust me, I'm a Quaker" was the title of the young people's programme, and this phrase has challenged us all. Some years into major changes in the organisation of our Yearly Meeting, we have reflected on our Quaker decision-making processes. Discernment is a discipline; it requires time, effort, trust, and practice. To engage in it fully, we need to let go of our own notions and preconceptions and pray with humility, "not my will but thine be done". In a culture that values speed and efficiency, our Quaker methods may seem slow, but they enable us to listen to and follow the guidance of the Spirit. Do we exercise enough patience and resist our desire for easy answers? Patient listening eventually leads to a feeling of rightness as a decision is reached; bringing our uncertainties into the presence of God is part of the search for truth.

Trusteeship is an important and evolving form of service within our Religious Society in Britain. Being a trustee and working with the structures of trusteeship is often challenging. We have heard, and held tenderly, stories from Friends who have direct experience of this work. We are all entrusted with gifts and with different aspects of the Society's life and witness. How can we best support one another in using our gifts for the good of all? How can we recognise and empower each other's service? Together, how can we help to heal our fractured world?

Our processes are precious but also fragile, vulnerable and risky. They take time, they can cause discomfort, and they can frustrate us. We sometimes make decisions without fully knowing where they will take us. Sometimes we get things wrong, and we must be willing to learn from our mistakes. Our struggles with discernment may not easily be resolved, but these very struggles can bring us blessings. We need not be afraid of confronting issues where the way forward is not clear or where Friends are not in unity. We trust in that Spirit which guides us into all Truth. Thomas Kelly describes this trust as “walking with a smile into the dark”.

In large and small groups, and in our personal encounters with other Friends, we need to practise deep listening to one another and to the promptings of love and truth. Being open about our decisions, and being prepared to talk about them, makes it easier for those physically absent from our meetings for business to trust that we have been led by the Spirit.

In the Swarthmore Lecture, Gerald Hewitson told the story of his personal journey, which took him from the barren landscape of his childhood to finding God’s love and acceptance. This was the spiritually transforming experience of the early Quakers. In our business method and in our discernment, Friends are together on a pilgrimage of hope. We continue to follow our Inward Teacher, sometimes falteringly, sometimes confidently, but always in company with those who have travelled this way before us and those who are journeying with us now. As we go, we learn to see ourselves and our world through God's eyes, the eyes of love.

Signed in and on behalf of Britain Yearly Meeting

[Chris Skidmore](#)
[Clerk](#)