



CHICHESTER QUAKERS INTER FAITH PLANNING GROUP NEWSLETTER

December 2018

“Love Thy Neighbour”



As a contribution to the national Inter Faith Week the Chichester Quaker Inter Faith Planning Group hosted a discussion event and our roving reporters attempted to capture a flavour of this occasion. It was compered by Bill McMellon.

In Bill's 'Welcome' he explained that the theme set for the evening's discussion was to be 'Love Thy Neighbour' as a gesture in countering the increased polarisation of races, and reflecting inter faith commonalities. The four speakers were introduced:-

Vicky Willson - representing the Vedic aspect of Hinduism
Mohamed Islam – from the Muslim community
Shira Sleight – from the Jewish community
Thelma Percy – from the Quaker community

HINDUISM.

Vicky explained that she would focus on the literature since it is easier to feel the power of the words and listen with the heart.

The “Bhagavad Gita” (“Song of the Lord”) is part of the sixth book of the Mahabharata, composed between 500BCE and 100CE, and is an account of the wars of the house of Bharata and holds an important position within the Hindu tradition.

The “Bhagavad Gita” contrasts between light and darkness and contains solutions to many problems. It is a description of civil war. But this is also a metaphor for the war raging within ourselves. We are pitted against our selfless self and our selfish self.

In the Bible, (Matthew 22:37-39) there is Jesus with his 2nd Commandment – the idea of loving your neighbour. There is also the Commandment Do unto Others (Matthew 7:12) , known as “The Golden Rule”, and Luke (Luke 10:25-37) illustrates this with the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is mirrored in the Bhagavad Gita

(Chapter 6,vs. 32) “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. This is the essence of morality.

In the Bible, (Matthew 25: 40) – “Ye that have done it to the least of my brethren have done it unto me”. A connection is made between ourselves and our neighbours: ‘they’ are ourselves. You and I are not we – you and I are one: there is no division in life.

In the Bhagavad Gita there is a dialogue between Arjuna – man of action, and Krishna, a spiritual teacher – who is considered to be the highest yogi. In the physical body – if a single cell pursues its own course there is chaos. You and I cannot be fulfilled by going our own way – there is joy and fulfilment in service of others. Live by this principle. Everyone is connected. If we live in harmony everyone benefits. If not, everyone suffers. This is the unity of life.

Meister Eckhart, the Christian mystic, said the seed of God is latent in all of us. Just as pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds into nut trees, and God seeds into God. This is a reflection on the fact that the divine personality that is in all of us. We must remove the weeds that impede our spirituality. Whatever lives is full of the Lord. He that sees joy in all creatures and in himself will also know no sorrows.

In the Bhagavad Gita (ch 10:vs20) , “.. there is none that exists separate from me. I am the self – seated in the hearts of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all beings.”

How to love our neighbour? Others and I are one. We can understand everyone’s needs by looking at our own. What upsets us, delights us, annoys us – will upset, delight and annoy others. This is not just theoretical – apply this to bridge these divisions. We cannot sit in a cave meditating, saying do not disturb. It must be the opposite – throw ourselves into service to others – at home, work, wherever we are.

ISLAM.

There are two scriptures – Quran (containing the word of Allah, in verse, as dictated to Muhammad) which is the most important and the Sunna (statements believed to be the practical example of Prophet Muhammad). Muslims understand the Quran through human action.

The Arabic word Allah is translated as lord or God. Adam was created through earth. We have 2 relationships – one with God and one with man. We are one big family. Idea of faith entwined with social responsibility. You cannot sit in your room and pray while causing harm to your neighbour by parking your car in the wrong place for example. Do no harm to your neighbour. Look after your parents, kinship, orphans, neighbour who is close and neighbour who is a stranger.

Your neighbour is not a mathematical distance, not a locality. Your neighbour is anyone you are in contact with – treat them with love and respect just like any neighbour. Peace be upon him is a Statement.

Humans live out their lives. For example, in an ancient text it describes a man cooking food, another said to him why do you not add more water (meaning increase

the amount) and give to your neighbour. Give to one another so you may love one another.

There are many branches to faith – the biggest branch is belief in God, the smallest branches are to move the obstacles in the pathway of our neighbour. We have a social and moral responsibility to others.

This is emphasised by this example claimed by Islam. The Quran was sent down by Archangel Gabriel to Muhammad. Muhammad was sitting and someone came – discussion with Gabriel was so long that it did not let others meet the prophet. When Gabriel left, they offered Muhammad water and he said that was Gabriel. Shows the need to look after my fellow neighbour.

“Entitled to my inheritance” – neighbour has a right over you – not a legal right, a quasi-legal – a moral responsibility. We try and implement Muhammad’s teachings. Be loving and kind to your neighbour, not just because you are a Muslim.



JUDAISM.

It is through the Torah that Jews interact and behave. The Torah forms the first part of the Jewish Bible and it is the central and the most important document of Judaism. It consists of the five books of Moses, the Old Testament. It is read on a Friday and Saturday which is the Jewish Shabbat - their Sabbath. It is important that all listen and conform to its teachings. Jewish Festivals are based around these books.

The principle ethics of worship are the Ten Commandments to Moses – who summoned the people waiting to hear what God had told Moses. God wanted Moses to pass on these for them to listen and do what the 10 Commandments commanded them to do. The people were informed that they had to rest - everyone around you should rest as also the animals (“Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day”) There is love over yourself and those in your community. This is important. The Commandments are also about things we should not do. Recognise boundaries. Respecting and loving our neighbour. These were put down many years ago but are still important. At our Festivals we stand up and read the 10 Commandments.

Hillel was an important writer and educator. “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour”. How you treat others is extremely important.

Jewish traditions taught greatest principle before Christianity - through example. Such as if you meet your enemy’s ox going astray, bring it back to him. Help him lift it up. You do not get on with everyone, but treat other’s possessions well and do not

hurt them. If enemy hungry – feed him. Love your neighbour. Jesus paraphrases the Torah.

One of the Commandments is to honour the Sabbath and keep it holy. At every Sabbath and within the prayer book there is a blessing for the Queen. This shows that Jewish people are very grateful and honoured that different countries have taken the Jewish people in – many people during World War Two – we recognise that a country is not our birth country.

We should get along, it is important to live side by side. Within Judaism when one gives money or gifts you do not say “I did that”. On Mitzvah day (although a commandment in Jewish law it is often used to mean a good deed or an act of kindness. It is an integral part of Jewish life.) we give to the needy. This is an aspect of loving thy neighbour and doing something about it.



QUAKERISM.

We emphasise faith in action over doctrine. Historically the Quakers have Christian roots and call ourselves the Religious Society of Friends. George Fox (1624 – 1691) founder, was in spiritual torment. “There is one Jesus, who can speak to your condition”, he said. Love thy Neighbour is a key aspect of the work we do.

Isaac Pennington (1616–1679) was one of the early members of the Quakers in England. He wrote about the Quaker movement and was an influential promoter and defender of it said “hold one another up with a tender hand” - loving action. There are many Quakers who have demonstrated the faith in action thereby demonstrating they do ‘take heed...to the prompting of their love and truth in their hearts.’ *

Woolman 1720 – an American Quaker, campaigned against slave trade.
“Compassion fills my heart”.

Elizabeth Fry 1780 – visited Newgate Prison. She also visited every convict ship and gave materials for women to make quilts, to sell on arrival.

Retreat in York – William Tuke – looked after patients with mental illness, and the Retreat is still operating today.

Daniel Wheeler – Tsar of Russia asked for specialists from the Quaker community to go to St Petersburg to help clear swamps, and show them a better method of farming.

“God’s love enables me to call every country my country and every man my brother”.

During the Irish famine – soup kitchens were provided.

Ada Salter – chose to live in poorest areas. As the first woman mayor of London, she organised sports and playgrounds and campaigned for tree-lined streets which still exist today.

80 years ago, Quakers helped with the Kinder transport.

There are now national and local charities – helping asylum seekers. Quaker Social Action for 151 years have provided training for the homeless for work. The Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network helps asylum seekers.

In our own local Meeting we provide pastoral work in the care for any individual in need. We are a Sanctuary Meeting. We provide support to a Drop in Centre for Asylum seekers in Portsmouth. We have chaplains that work in a prison and the local hospital who support the spiritual needs of those who require it. One of our Members spends 6 months a year in Gambia in order to develop and enhance the lives of people there. We have formed a LGBTQ group which provides a safe and caring environment. Love Thy Neighbour

**Quaker advice and Queries – a corporate collection of the insights of the Society of Friends used for private reflection.*

There followed a spirited debate on various topics, here is a flavour of it:-

- *the battle between selfishness and selflessness within us
- *focussing on the positives rather than the negatives
- * sharing
- *building bridges
- *similarity between the teachings of the various faiths.

Chichester Quakers would like to thank all, especially our guest speakers, for participating in this enjoyable and interesting evening.

TB. November 2018.



Friday, 21st September, was the International Day of Peace, and Chichester Cathedral instigated a series of events called “Live Better Together”, to stimulate thoughts of what peace means in our own lives, local community and the wider world today. The article below is a resume of just one of those events.

CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE IN THE VICARS HALL

This was the theme, and venue, of an Interfaith meeting held on 16.10.18 and attended by at least half a dozen Chichester Quakers amongst an audience of perhaps fifty people. What are the root causes of violence and how do we overcome them?

The Hindu speaker told a tale of a dog fighting its own reflection in a mirror. "From duality comes fear". But, she said, what is similar within us is greater than the perceived differences and it is here that solutions to conflict might be found. She talked about Dharma :- That which integrates.

The Rabbi who spoke began by saying that "Judaism is not a pacifist religion. We recognise that war is a very bad thing but... not evil...that said we have no higher value than seeking peace". He talked about the situation between Israelis and Palestinians, saying that there is not a single sane person in Israel who does not desire peace. The evidence for this, he said, was that peace had been made with Egypt and Jordan. "It may be a diplomatically cold peace but a peace is a peace". Moving on, he said that only in recent times had Christianity ceased to be an Evangelical religion. He talked about the wars between Christianity and Islam being about word domination. The root cause of violence is people. Ideology was the cause of (did he mean many?) twentieth century wars. "The beginning and the end of it is the urge to power".

The Imaam again discussed the wars between Christianity and Islam. He mentioned how Jews had been protected for many centuries in Islamic countries. He talked about conflict within marriage. "A result of a peaceful marriage is give more, take less". How can we deal with wars? We should get the leaders who want us to fight to do the fighting themselves. Countries such as the US, Australia and New Zealand had been "built on war". He compared Churchill's role in the Bengal famine of 1943-4 with the atrocities committed in the concentration camps. How do we get two parties to come together? "You've got to be willing to want peace". "Brexit is a war". He said that, if you lose your job because of Brexit, you'll be looking for some-one of my colour to blame.

The Anglican cleric quoted James to the effect that "You want something and you cannot have it so you commit murder". Conflict ultimately arises when people follow the world's agenda, not God's. She discussed the

place of Original sin and the fall in all of this. Humans are less than perfect and we should love our neighbours as ourselves. Saint Paul advocated love and kindness. We should, she said, try to find common ground with others. Forgiveness is important. She discussed Just War where, according to Thomas Aquinas, there must be legitimate authority, just cause and right intention. To this, in modern times, has been added the requirement that if the war is to be just it must be a last resort, proportionate to the cause and causing no civilian casualties.

There then followed questions which included a discussion of the contribution played by Christianity in violence as well as whether some people were evil.

Bill McMellon, 27.11.18