



# INTER FAITH PLANNING GROUP NEWSLETTER JUNE 2019.



## **FUTURE EVENT.**

Please note that there will be a meeting of the Inter Faith Planning Group on Tue. 25th, June 7.00 p.m. at the Meeting House. All Friends are welcome.

## **NEWS OF RECENT EVENTS.**

The Inter Faith Planning Group continued its outreach work with two contrasting events during the first half of this year. The newest venture was a visit to the Buddhist Monastery at Chithurst an account of which is given below. This is followed by a description of a lively celebration of the Passover Haggadah given earlier this year at the Meeting House by the Sussex Jewish Outreach Group.

### **Chichester Quaker Visit to the Buddhist Sangha.**



One bright sunny morning at the beginning of a promising summer, 16 Quakers converged on to an unsuspecting and tranquil Buddhist community, Cittaviveka, each bringing our gifts of food for a community that depends on such gifts. We were met by our genial host for the day Ajahn Ahimsako who will succeed Ajahn Karuniko who retires in November this year.

After off-loading our food gifts to the kitchen staff already making lunchtime preparations, our host led us into the conservatory (overlooking part of the spacious estate) in the Victorian house, which formed part of the ensemble of community premises. Ajahn commenced the main programme with the history of the community and a basic introduction to Theravada Buddhism. He emphasised the dependency the sangha has on others for both food and non-food supplies and general support. This was to facilitate integration with the outside world. Additionally, monks are not allowed to handle money.



Cittaviveka was the first Ajahn Chah monastery to be established outside of Thailand. Started by Ajahn Sumedho, its establishment coincided with Ajahn Chah's visit to Britain in 1979. The property includes Chithurst House, its adjacent Dhamma (Meditation) Hall, and Hammer Wood with many meditation *kuṭīs* (huts). There is also the Rocana Vihāra for nuns and Āloka for their female guests. Ajahn Karuniko is the current abbot.

Cittaviveka is a monastery in the lineage of the Thai Forest Tradition of Theravada Buddhism and, appropriately enough, it is situated in donated open land and forest consisting of about 140 acres. Theravada Buddhism is strongest in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Burma (Myanmar). The name means 'the doctrine of the elders' - the elders being the senior Buddhist monks. This school of Buddhism believes that it has remained closest to the original teachings of the Buddha. However, it does not over-emphasise the status of these teachings in a fundamentalist way - they are seen as tools to help people understand the truth, and not as having merit of their own.

The Buddha: Siddhartha Gautama was a man who became Buddha, the Awakened One. Since his death the only contact with him is through his teachings which point to the awakened state: the Path to Enlightenment. Each being has to make their own way to enlightenment without the help of God or gods. Buddha's teachings show the way, but making the journey is up to us.



The Path to Enlightenment is via the Four Noble Truths.\* It is important to realise that each of these Noble Truths are not The Absolutes, they are concepts to reflect upon. This is why meditation and concentration are vital elements of the way to enlightenment.

The first Noble Truth is that "There is suffering", *dukkha*. Suffering is the common bond all humans share: therefore it is not 'I am suffering', but that 'There is the presence of suffering'. It is important in reflection not to focus on the 'me' or 'I', but rather to observe, witness, and understand things as they are.

There are three aspects of the First Noble Truth: recognition that 'There is suffering'; 'It should be understood'; and 'It has been understood'.

Firstly, *Dukkha*/suffering can be wide-ranging eg mild irritation anger, anguish, despair etc. Through the sensory world we are all subject to pain and pleasure – the dualism of the cycle of life ie birth, living, death. Since we all are subjected to the pleasure/pain principle we are naturally inclined to or repelled by, one or the other. With anything unpleasant we enter the realm of denial and avoid acceptance of reality by seeking some way of getting rid of, or suppressing whatever is upsetting us. Secondly, the suffering needs to be understood. Whatever form it takes, whether extreme or slight, it should be investigated. This means confronting whatever it is and attempting to understand it, understanding that is, exactly what our minds are creating around it. This way we learn about our own reactions to life –the way things are, by the people around us, and by what ourselves bring to a given situation.

Lastly, by mindfulness we can reflect upon those matters that upset us. Is it of our own making? Do we create our own *dukkha*?

The second Noble Truth is that there is an origin of suffering and this is the attachment to three kinds of desire:-

- always seeking things to excite or satisfy the senses;
- to become something so that we can get caught up in that moment of striving for wealth, promotion or whatever it is;
- to get rid of things for example when we get disillusioned trying to become something for example I want to get rid of my suffering, anger jealousy etc. and I will become...

These three categories of desires are merely convenient ways of contemplating desire and form different aspects of it. On the completion of the contemplation come the 'letting go of them'. If we listen for these desires we are no longer attaching to them so they can be laid aside, let them go acknowledging them to be the way they are.

The Third Noble Truth is that there is a cessation of suffering, dukkha which should be realised. The cessation of dukkha has been realised. The whole aim of the Buddhist teaching is to develop the reflective mind by contemplation in order to let go of delusions. Through knowing desires without judgement we come to see them as they are. By laying them aside rather than grasping at them, nirodha is experienced, the cessation of suffering and eventual peace.

*"All that is subject to arising is subject to ceasing"*

The fourth Noble Truth is that the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path:-

Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration\*

Appropriately at this point Ajahn led us into the practice of meditation to conclude our visit.

*\*Although Ajahn Ahimsako delivered an excellent talk on this subject I have thought it appropriate to expand what he had said in order to give a better understanding of what is required of the monks. For this I have heavily borrowed from the book by Ajahn Sumedho "The Four Noble Truths", published by Amaravati Buddhist Monastery operating as Amaravati Publications. This book is amongst other literature by the same publisher which was available and gratis to any visitor to Cittaviveka Monastery.*

Chichester Quakers would like to thank Ajahn Ahimsako for acting as our host for the day and for his generosity in the giving of his time. Our thanks also to Ajahn Karuniko for his encouragement to our visit.

Trevor Beckett, June 2019.



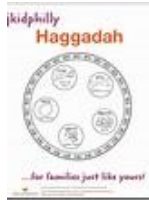
## PASSOVER HAGGADAH.



Chichester Quakers hosted members of the Sussex Jewish Outreach Group to celebrate the Passover. The Haggadah is the book which tells the story of the Exodus of the Israelites from their enslavement by the Egyptians. The Seder is the order of the service which describes the rituals of the annual celebratory meal, indicating when and how each rite is performed, although there is some flexibility on what is included which was reflected in this evening's event.



The evening celebrations commenced with the first cup of wine (actually red grape juice!). There are four such occasions when this is drunk and there are many suggestions as to the symbolism of this. One suggestion, for example, is that the number represents the four corners of the world from which freedom is sought; or, God's four promises to save the Jewish people – "I will bring you out; I will deliver you; I will redeem you; I will take you to be my people", (Exodus 6.6.7).



The first tasting of the symbolic food consisted of a green vegetable (karpas), a reminder of springtime and hope, which is dipped in salt water in remembrance of the tears of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt, as well as a reminder of the pain of others. Also, matzots (unleavened bread) were displayed representing the bread eaten by them and a wish for freedom for all.

The recitation of the four questions seemed to act as a springboard for the retelling of the Passover Story: the migration of the people from Israel because of the famine there, to Egypt; their subsequent enslavement; their plea to God for their freedom; the visitation of the Ten Plagues God brought upon the Egyptians and the slaying of their first born, because of their disobedience to God; and the eventual freedom of the people. Such an annual recitation of this story is to remind Jews of the importance of human freedom.

It was time for a second cup of wine! This to symbolise intellectual freedom – closed minds lead to misunderstanding and human suffering. There is a need to understand the ideas and beliefs of others.

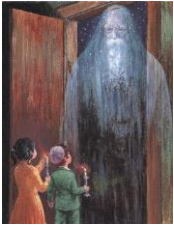


Three more symbolic foods followed this, interspersed with prayers (Barucha). The shank bone – the lamb which the Israelites sacrificed to God when they left Egypt and symbolic of their rejection of idolatry; the lamb also that the Egyptians worshipped. Here, was a reference to modern times when idols in the form of human beings are 'worshipped' instead of God, as during WW2 with the consequent slaughter of millions. This symbol is a reminder of the obligation to combat idolatry to ensure the spiritual freedom of all.

Now the Matza, eaten as a way of reliving the Exodus, and with a bitter herb (maror) which causes the eyes to water - 'tears', in memory of the enslaved Israelites.

A meal is now eaten which is followed by the Afikomen – we eat a piece of matzah previously hidden, which is a reminder of the Pascal sacrifice, the third cup of wine symbolises spiritual freedom.

**ELIJAH'S CUP.** After the conclusion of the Seder's Grace After Meals, there is a universally accepted custom to pour a cup of wine (the "Cup of Elijah"), open the front door of the home and invite in Elijah, the Prophet. There are many reasons and meanings behind this ancient tradition. This cup of Elijah is one from which we can never drink until the redemption is complete, until the world is at peace, until justice and compassion reign, and where corruption and bigotry cease.



"Eliyahu Hanavi" - by Zalman Kleinman

Somewhere within this programme we were all entertained by Bill playing a foot-tapping klezmer melody on his violin. *Klezmer is a musical tradition of the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe. Played by professional musicians called klezmerim, the genre originally consisted largely of dance tunes and instrumental display pieces for weddings and other celebrations* ([Wikipedia](#)). He rounded this off singing an unaccompanied folk song.

We thank our Jewish friends for an enjoyable, informative and heart-warming evening masterfully led by Nick Beck.

Trevor Beckett.