



Forty-Three newsletter

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Oxford Friends Meeting
43 St Giles Oxford OX1 3LW



Another World of Stillness and Inner Discipline

Editorial note: this piece was prompted by the article by Juliet Henderson in the September 43 Newsletter in which she referred to both the protagonist of the film 'Woman at War', and to her bow and arrow, as (peaceful) weapons of minor destruction.

Living in Japan I was extraordinarily fortunate in being introduced to Urakami *Kyu-dojo* where I learnt Japanese archery for six years in a historic and much-revered school. I quickly came to appreciate that etiquette and service underpinned archery practice, and I sought refinement equally in both my skill and character. I spoke only very basic

Japanese at the outset, but my teachers and fellow archers liked my earnest and singular determination to both learn and contribute whatever I could to the running of the school. Being the only carpenter, there was no shortage of opportunity to do the latter and I quickly became a core member.

Sunau *sensei*, our teacher, never tired of telling me that wanting to hit the target was the cancer of archery and I should avoid this at all costs. During practice, his wife Hiroko *sensei* would repeatedly caution us "don't think about hitting the target, think about how you are releasing the arrow". She was renowned for her kindness as much as for her skill with the bow, later becoming the only woman to ever be awarded *Kyudo* (the way of the bow) 10th dan. The high level of their combined technical instructions acquired through a lifetime of experience, came close to being eclipsed by the warmth of the atmosphere within which teaching steeped in tradition took place.

I gradually developed a physical concentration that encompassed my entire body rather than simply remaining confined in my head. This served to extricate me from the lure of the target. At times, particularly in a competition or grading, this concentration would vanish as I momentarily forgot Hiroko *sensei's* words – after which it was anybody's guess where the arrow flew. When I maintained an inward attention coupled with an indifference to

Deadline for contributions to the February 2020 issue: noon, Wednesday 15 January

Contributions, preferably of 500 words or fewer, can be emailed to newsletter@oxfordquakers.org, or a paper copy can be left in the pigeonhole of any editor. Items for the calendar (on the last page) can be emailed to office@oxfordquakers.org.

the outcome of the shot, I came to be able to hit close to the centre of the target at 28m with reasonable ease. I quickly achieved an initial level of skill, which in time was to plummet along with my success. I returned to basics, looking towards humility, a clean selfless approach, and being quietly meticulous in my practice. I became careful to leave my pride in the dojo entrance as I removed my shoes and entered the shooting place, first reverently bowing in prayer to a Shinto altar, clapping to summon God's witness to my practice before similarly bowing to my teachers and fellow archers, all of whom I hoped to learn from. My skill in time grew.



Five years on, I was participating in our Heki-ryu shooting style's annual competition at Meiji Jingu, the imperial shrine in Tokyo. Having hit the target with three of my four arrows I faced a pitfall every Japanese archer knows and fears. The successful shooting of four arrows into a 35cm target known as *Kai chu*, is beyond most novices. Even long-experienced archers will struggle to maintain what is required to allow a subjugation of personality and desire to stand firm and follow procedure when facing the target. As I brought my arrow back and down over my ear into a full draw of the bow, I suddenly experienced an internal weakness, a voice telling me that yet again today I would miss the fourth arrow. I noticed my right arm beginning to weaken. I resolutely refused to give in to this thought. I remained focused on my stance and bearing whilst maintaining a balanced push of the bow with my left-hand against a pull of the

bowstring with my right. My mind was occupied with '*Mu*' (nothingness), no desire other than for my hands to travel in a balanced movement in opposite directions along the path of the released arrow. The arrow shot true and on the words "*Kai chu*" being uttered as it struck the target and the customary applause broke out, I lowered my bow and retired modestly from the shooting place indifferent to the successful outcome. It was as if someone else had released the last shot and not me. My initial sense of being perplexed at this thought was overcome by one of serenity.

Having exceeded the results of all the more experienced and skilled archers participating in the competition, I was swathed with congratulations. After lunch I shot with increased confidence but very poorly, only managing to hit with one arrow. A colleague said that it was as if a very different Tim was shooting. At the end of what had been a long day, my name was called out for a tie-breaker. Shooting alongside four other archers, I returned to my earlier internal discipline and humility. On retrieval of the shot arrows, I was surprised to discover that mine had hit closest to the centre of the target, leaving me happy and very humbled rather than exalted.

I came to hold my teachers and fellow archers with affection and respect. Older members of our school, including my teacher, with whom I regularly practiced, had fought in WWII. My teacher narrowly escaped death three times before taking a train to Hiroshima, which was held up by a day, thus saving him from being killed by the dropping of the atomic bomb onto that city. The notion of wishing to harm let alone kill any of these same men or their families was of course repugnant to me, and so it was that I came to learn not only archery but also modesty and the senselessness of war in a small Japanese archery school during the years I worked in Tokyo.

I regularly return to my school. Both my teachers have since died, but what I learned from them remains very much alive in me.

Tim Toomey

Pick'n'Mix

A few years ago, I was having lunch with a friend when the subject of Quakerism came up. "Ah yes," said he, "that's one of those pick'n'mix faiths where you choose the things you want to believe in and ignore the rest, isn't it?" A strong response was clearly called for! But, as I was formulating my rebuttal, more food arrived, and the conversation moved on. Nevertheless, a seed had been sown in the weed patch that passes for my brain.

There it lay dormant until, one day during Meeting for Worship, it started to germinate. I realised that I was glad I hadn't rebutted my friend's comment because, on reflection, he was right! In my view, Quakerism really is a pick'n'mix faith. If you haven't already tossed aside your copy of Forty-three in disgust, I'll try to explain.



My Quaker faith is framed by our testimonies, but I believe that when it comes to deciding how we live out those testimonies in our lives, we must make our own choices. Or to put it another way, we must pick'n'mix. There's plenty of support material to help us – *Faith and Practice* and *The Bible*, to name but two invaluable sources – but ultimately we must decide for ourselves, with the help of the leadings and insights we gain during Meeting for Worship. Does that make the Quaker faith a soft option, which I suspect was the suggestion hidden in my friend's question? It certainly doesn't for me, as I find it exceedingly difficult to live my life in line with our testimonies, and if I'm honest, I probably fail more often than I succeed. Our pick'n'mix approach is not a way of avoiding challenges but it is a way of providing flexibility for each of us to worship in our

own way, according to our own leadings. And that, for me, is one of the great glories of the Quaker faith.

But is Quakerism alone in being a 'selective' faith? I believe it is not. After all, there are mercifully few faiths that try to follow biblical teachings in their entirety, or there would be even more smiting and slaying in the world than we already have. The distinctive aspect of Quakerism is, however, that each Quaker makes their own individual choices, whereas followers of many other faiths have the choices made for them by a priestly elite. We get pick'n'mix, they get a box of chocolates with the flavours already decided!

Which is better? Once again, I believe that the answer depends on the individual. For some people, a faith that offers programmed worship and strong guidance is the best way for them to approach the divine. Others are better served by unprogrammed worship and the experiential approach. Maybe George Fox would disagree with me, but I think neither way is right or wrong. I am sure, however, that Quakerism is the right option for me, and I've come to realise that I'm very glad it's a pick'n'mix faith!

Keith Wilson



Poems in the library

The next two ordinary Poems in the Library are from 16:00 till 18:00 on Monday 6 January (theme *epiphany*), and from 16:00 till 18:00 on Monday 17 February (theme *sounds*). All welcome!

Stephen Yeo

stephen.yeo@phonecoop.coop

Spirituality & Mathematics

This will be an evening's exploration of spiritual aspects of mathematics. The only necessary previous experience is of being human; leave your habitual reactions at the door! If five or more people sign up, we will experience various mathematical themes that some at least consider to have a spiritual dimension or aspect. Expressions of interest to John Mason at john.mason@open.ac.uk. A contribution to the Garden Room Project will be expected. Event to take place in February or March 2020.

John Mason

Matthew Faulk Lecture on Salamone Rossi Friday 31 January 2020 1 Canterbury Road, Oxford

Salamone Rossi was a Jewish Italian composer who worked in the Mantuan Court alongside Monteverdi at the turn of the 17th Century. He was the first composer to set Hebrew liturgy to Western Classical music, in a collection called (in Hebrew) Ha-Shirim Asher Li'Shlomo - The Songs of Solomon (a play on the Hebrew title for the Song of Songs). Matthew will tell how a Jewish composer introduced 'Christian' style music into the Mantuan Synagogue and created some of the most beautiful liturgical music of the early Baroque period. Everyone is welcome. Come from 12:30 and have a warm drink with your picnic lunch before the talk starts at 13:00. Meetings close at 14:00.

Elisabeth Salisbury

Bulbs

Every winter
A wafer-thin, crackling
Parched parchment
Exterior
You'd think death
Or sell-by date
But bulbs are full
Of contradictions

Housed in glass
Above water
Roots dangling
Or nestled in a
Pot's worth of soil
Each day
Their growth
A ticking off
Of the days
On the monotonous
Grey January
Calendar
A hint of green
Becomes a spear
Pointing heavenwards
One's never quite sure
If the magic
Will work
If the deep red
Lush blush of
The amaryllis
Will burst from
Its silent sheath
Or the sweet scented
Bells of the
Hyacinth peal
Out from behind
Their squat campaniles
But they do

A ritual reminder
Of beauty within

Juliet Henderson



CALENDAR FOR JANUARY 2020

All at 43 St Giles unless otherwise indicated

Please note:

Office is closed until 6 Jan

Date	Time	Event
Wed 1 Jan		No Wednesday lunchtime Meeting for Worship
Sun 5 Jan	10:30 - 11:30	Single Combined Meeting for Worship, but NO Meeting for Worship for Business this month
Mon 6 Jan	16:00 - 18:00	Poems in the Library: Theme <i>epiphany</i>
Thurs 9 Jan	17:30 - 19:30	Pastoral Care Group
Fri 10 Jan	19:00 for 19:30	Friday with Friends. Iain McLean in conversation with Jocelyn Bell Burnell Please note this is a ticketed event. Tickets available from the office.
Sat 11 Jan	10:30 start	Area Meeting. All day event.
Mon 13 Jan	18:30 - 20:30	Elders' Meeting
Tues 14 Jan	12:30 - 13:30	Soup Lunch - restarts after Christmas break
Sat 18 Jan	14:00 - 17:00	Memorial Meeting for Susan Leys
Sun 19 Jan	11:30 - 13:00	OSAM Trustees Meeting
Sun 26 Jan	12:15	Bring your own lunch. (This is replacing shared lunch)
Tues 28 Jan	10:15 - 11:15	Memorial Meeting for Dorothy Bartles (To be confirmed.)
Thurs 30 Jan	19:00 - 21:30	S.E.E. Justice

From Quaker Faith and Practice

*We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will.
Show a loving consideration for all creatures, and seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the world.
Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life.
Rejoice in the splendour of God's continuing creation.*

Quaker Faith & Practice, Advices & Queries No. 42

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

1st Sunday of each month
10:30am at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

2nd 3rd & 4th Sunday of each month
9:30am & 11:00am at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

Monday
7:00pm Young Adult Friends at 43 St Giles
(followed by baked potato supper)

Tuesday & Thursday
7:30am at 43 St Giles
(followed by breakfast at 8:00am)

Wednesday
12:15pm at 43 St Giles
(followed by tea and coffee)

Headington LM worship on Sunday
10:00am at The Priory,
85 Old High Street, OX3 9HT

Forty-Three is available online, at
www.oxfordquakers.org/newsletter

If you are considering writing an article or notice but would prefer it not to go online, please don't hesitate to contribute it. Just indicate that the piece is not for inclusion in the internet version — no reason will be asked for. Articles and notices are very welcome to appear in the print edition only, and the same applies to calendar items.

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.

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