

Forty-Three Newsletter

Number 537
January 2024

Oxford Friends Meeting

43 St Giles', Oxford OX1 3LW

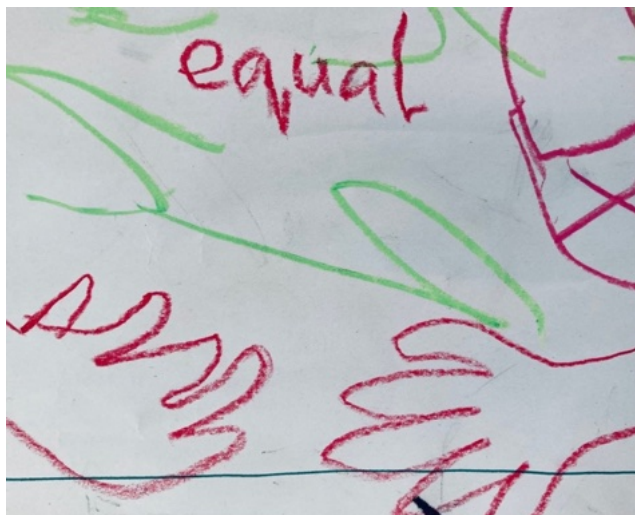
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On Apple Trees and the Gifts Children Bring

Julia Dover
Children, Young People
and Families Development Worker



Pruning an apple tree is an act of love. Removing dead branches, one has in mind the blossom and fruit they bore, nests held, the blackbird that sang high up in the sway, storms that whipped the leaves- over decades. Each cut of the saw is a surrender to the possible: may the sap flow, may we taste the fruit anew.

Over these past months, I've likened Oxford's New Wave process to pruning an ancient tree- honouring generations' worth of growth, looking for where the sap has

stopped and where it rises still, discerning where to make the cuts, and throughout, a surrender to new life. My respect to Friends for opening to big questions, just as we collectively face the largest global questions as a species. The invitation to question, open and grow is upon us now, everywhere- a truly exciting time to be alive together.

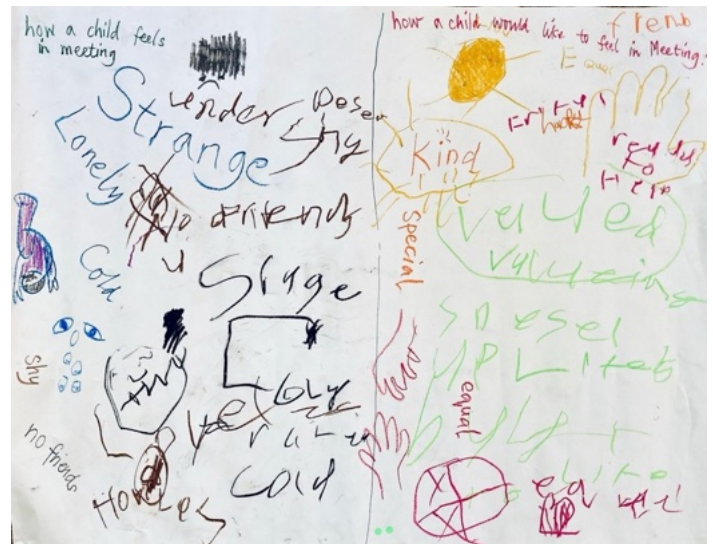
With the above in mind- apple trees, open questions and love- I'd like to reflect upon ministry the children gave during the New Wave Day on 25 November.

As context for readers who weren't present and reminder for those who were: during the morning small group session when adults discussed a series of questions, children explored the same (slightly adapted) questions in the Long Room, the results of which they offered as shared ministry in the Meeting House. When asked "imagine you are a child coming to Meeting

for the first time: how do you feel? How would you like to feel?”, their written response was arresting for its emotional fluency, clarity and power. As one of the grown-ups in their midst I can vouch that we were blown away as they spoke, wrote and drew their feelings. Looking back, I also recall their lack of judgement with astonishment: they were simply expressing their truth.

If you look at the poster with your heart’s eye, observe the choice of colours- black and brown for how a child feels in meeting; vital orange, red and green for how they wish to feel. Just beholding the colour contrast, one has a visceral sense of their experience. Then the words they use- incisive, articulate- leave no doubt: ‘strange, lonely, cold, shy, no friends’- describe their experience in Meeting, whereas ‘equal, special, valued, valuing, ready to help, uplifted, kind’ evoke how they’d like to feel: language of disconnection versus connection. The drawings of the sun and two hands reaching out are images of radiant connection: these children long to share their innate and beautiful flow- with you. The poster suggests they are sad because the adults in Meeting don’t feel the same.

On the New Wave Day, the children shared their ministry as a gift, which I pass to you with an accompanying question- whether through their ministry the children have given the shadow of Meeting- those qualities and attributes the community has buried- to Friends for integration?



To investigate this possibility, I offer further questions:

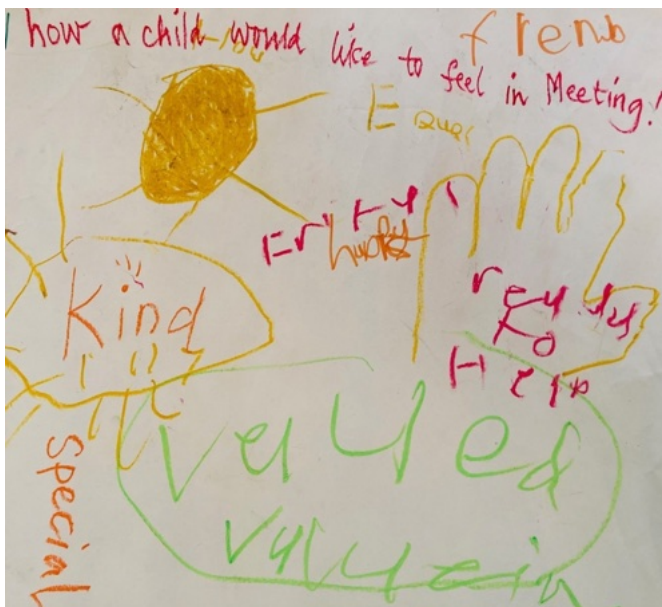
-The marginalisation of children’s voice and presence has a root. Could the Meeting engage in a frank, compassionate encounter with the (probably inherited) beliefs and assumptions commonly held by Friends about the place and care of children? What did Friends experience when they were children? What surfaces for Friends when children are in their midst? Is there a place/need for healing?

-Do Friends engage with their own inner childlike qualities- ie wonder, joy, spontaneity, exuberance, infectious curiosity? Do they feel comfortable bringing these qualities into the Meeting? Is there room as a worthy Quaker to express these innate qualities?

-What are some of the beliefs behind the cultural expectation that adults must abandon ‘childish things’, ie our innate and ageless childlike qualities- when we reach adulthood? Is there a space to reassess these beliefs?

What is the heart-based shift that is being asked of the Meeting so that care of youngsters becomes a truly collective impulse and is seen as a precious privilege at the core of the community (think here of how all elephants in a herd help to raise the babies)?

What journey- collectively and individually- must Friends embrace so that when a child crosses the threshold of 43, they are greeted as equal, that they know this is their home where they are loved as they are, free to express their radiant selves?



Once the new co-clerks and elders assume their roles from January, I hope to offer sessions to accompany Friends to delve into these questions in a way that is proactive, meaningful and fun. In the meantime, may you hold these questions, the images the children gave, and your responses to each- with open curiosity.

I conclude as I began, with apple trees- this image from the garden of Oscar Wilde's tale 'The Selfish Giant,' that grounds a shift of winter ice into spring sap and flower- in the love of a child.



'The Selfish Giant' by Oscar Wilde

From Matthew 18:

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.'

Figure Dressed in Red with White Beard Spotted on Meeting House Roof

Some Friends have reported sightings of a festive visitor on the roof of the meeting house on the evening of the 24th December. One Friend reports that the individual was wearing Birkenstock sandals and was heard singing the words “Ho, ho, ho”.

Any further sightings please report to the Newsletter team.

Facing Up to Slavery

Richard Seebohm

Friday with Friends on 8 December was about Facing up to Slavery. This continued the work of Carol Saker's group launched by Oxford Meeting in May. Our speaker was Ann Morgan of Lancaster Meeting. She is a member of the Yearly Meeting's Coordinating Group on Reparations – more of that later.

To start with, the transatlantic slave trade was begun by the Spanish and Portuguese, whose ships and sailors found lands to grow tropical crops, and populations in Africa which could be induced – by force – to work in them. Popes from the fifteenth century had seen slavery of Africans as a fact of life, given that they were not expected to become Catholics. British involvement, by colonising in the Caribbean, was mainly later, but Queen Elizabeth I in her time commissioned a couple of slaving voyages.

George Fox got to Barbados in 1671 and saw the slaves as needing humane treatment rather than immediate freedom. Quaker

concern at the inhumanity of it all, however, soon followed, notably among a small group, convinced by Fox and Penn, who had moved to America from Germany. They wrote to local slave-owning Friends in 1688 saying, '...to bring men hither, or to rob and sell them against their will, we stand against.' They got their concern to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1696, only to be told that this was 'a thing of too great a weight to determine'. This objection didn't last long. London Yearly Meeting responded in 1727 to an abolitionist epistle from Philadelphia by minuting, 'It is the sense of this Meeting that the Importation of Negroes from their Native Country and relations by Friends is not a Commendable nor Allowable Practice, and that Practice is censured by this Meeting.' It took British Friends another 30 years to realise that they were letting the issue slip, but in 1761 Yearly Meeting resolved that any Friend trading in slaves should be disowned. After that the political and faith-based abolitionist campaign in Britain gained momentum until an 1806 Act of the UK Parliament banned the transatlantic trade and an 1833 Act made enslavement in Britain and its colonies illegal.

With this background, it occurred to our speaker to check out what had gone on in her own Quaker community of Lancaster. She found that slavery had underpinned the livelihoods of many families. Lancaster was then a key port, though now it is silted up. Sugar and tobacco were the initial slave-grown end products, but later on cotton from mainland America became important. Some Friends were merchants in these products, and others were shipbuilders, ship owners, plantation investors, suppliers of commodities (such as gunpowder) used to

buy slaves from African intermediaries. There were gunmakers. Proceeds were invested in land. Bankers were necessarily involved and family connections still exist. A letter from York Meeting in 1792 asked whether Lancaster had disowned its slave trade participants but got no reply. The only disownments on record were for marrying out, failing to attend Meeting, and 'privateering' – the installation of weapons (cannons) in slave ships. Only the 1833 Act finally cleared the air, though there was no way of ending the import of cotton. It took the Civil War of 1861-65 to free the slaves who grew it.

Lancaster Meeting acknowledges this history and is recording it. There is a slave trail. Other local churches have joined the exploration. Stories are coming in from other countries.

We now have the focus on facing up to slavery and our Yearly Meeting's Coordinating Group. With reparations in its title, it is coordinating with other slavery-linked Meetings. The chocolate companies have their own slave histories to examine.

Conclusions so far are that reparations could well cover:

- Loss of freedom and culture – you would once be fined for teaching a slave to read;
- Loss of rights for contributions made by slaves to technologies and practices which created wealth for plantation owners;
- Loss to African countries of generations of healthy young people and of damage to their economies over time.

- Conditions in formerly slave-based lands

We should not focus on the needs of descendants from slaves so much as on communities and individuals who suffer from the legacy of slavery. They themselves need to play a significant part in the process. We are now helpfully hearing from such people

Commemoration is important. We do need to build new relationships and take advantage of diversities.

It is still the beginning of the journey.

Monthly collection: Ramallah Friends School Appeal

**Matthew Gee
Children and Young People's
Committee
CYPC**

Ramallah Friends School (RFS) holds a unique place in the heart of the West Bank, Palestine, offering a Quaker education that has touched the lives of children aged 3-18 for many years. Help us keep Ramallah Friends School education alive. Hold our children in the light. As the ongoing turmoil in Palestine persists, we urgently seek your support to ensure education continues to thrive despite adversity. <https://www.rfs.edu.ps/en/page/make-a-gift>

The Human Costs of War: Voices from Gaza and Israel

Gwithian Doswell

Quaker Roots (previously “Roots of Resistance”) is a community of Friends building a creative, vibrant and radical Quaker response to the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) arms fair held in London every two years. They are organising an online zoom webinar on Thursday 11th January at 7pm - 8.30pm

THE HUMAN COST OF WAR: VOICES FROM GAZA AND ISRAEL

Hear directly from Shahd Safi and Sahar Vardi, peace activists in Gaza and Israel, and Anna Stavrianakis in the UK on the role of the global and UK arms trade in the Israel/Palestine conflict.

Speakers:

Shahd Safi - a journalist and teacher in Gaza

Sahar Vardi - Jewish-Israeli peace activist

Anna Stavrianakis - Professor of International Relations, University of Sussex

This is an opportunity to ask questions, hear what Shahd and Sahar might like us to do, and to explore what action on the arms trade we might want to take.

Please register on the Quaker Roots website to receive the Zoom link

<https://www.quaker-roots.org.uk/events/?civiwp=CiviCRM&q=civicrm/event/info&reset=1&id=83>

This is a free event - All warmly welcome

My Personal New Storm

Anne Watson

I felt massive turmoil after attending OSAM on November 13th and the New Wave meeting on November 25th. Maybe I was ready for renewal and reminding, but I am driven to write because one of the messages I heard from both events is that I pussy-foot around talking about matters of belief. This is because I know that among Friends there are many, many, differences in the ways Friends describe their commitments to the Society, the beliefs that led us here, and the scaffolds within our Meeting. Yet, as Paul says in Corinthians 2, 3.6, ‘the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life’. Why did Ghandi use this phrase to express ‘unity in diversity’ of beliefs? Why did our elders at Balby, 1656, use this phrase to discern guidance (QF&P 1.01)? I have to get behind and beyond what I and others mean when religious language is used.

So I had better start by saying what I mean by ‘Spirit’. The spirit I recognise is not anthropomorphic, and not agentic. It cannot force me to act in certain ways, nor does it have plans for me or for others, but it can break through in my thoughts and speech in unexpected ways. It has not chosen me for anything; nor has it chosen Quakers in general to be special people in some way. (Believing that one is specially chosen can be a dangerous step). In my experience it is my choice to let it influence my thoughts, actions and words – through worship for example. Nor does it organise the world of human affairs. But nevertheless I feel its presence as a flow, etymologically as a breath, that unites people and has the effect of drawing me, and others, into its

flow. I am often in the peloton (like a cycling event) in which cyclists feel less friction in their flow. Among Quakers I certainly feel far less friction than among religious groups who see God as powerfully agentive: creator, shaper, an actor in their lives, a source of instruction and a judge - sometimes even using the word 'God' as a vehicle for announcing human expectations of others.

I am comfortable to use the word 'God' because in our Society there are many others who use that name but do not see 'God' as a controlling and judging being who wants certain behaviour from me. However, 'Spirit' describes my experience better. Spirit is the breath in which I also breathe. Spirit doesn't tell me anything, but I can breathe it in and sometimes its fragrance takes me by surprise.

In the November OSAM meeting, for which I had prepared by joining a pre-reading group, I was taken by surprise by Janet Scott's comment that her whole lecture had been about Jesus. Somehow this had passed me by! I had thought it was about Quaker theology and, looking back, of course this must mean what can be learnt from the writings we have about Jesus. I had taken this as given – that there are at least four authorised records of his life and actions from which I might choose to learn. I had so muddled the waters for myself with hostility to dogma and unbelievable phenomena that I had missed some essentials that hold true whether he is seen as a historic figure, a divine being, a presence in one's life, a figure to which certain beliefs can be attached, or a romanticised figure in stories that serve to advise about living a good life. In all these forms, however, I could learn that a good life can be lived when all people are fed

(physically and spiritually), healed, loved, included, forgiven, welcomed, questioned, challenged, answered, talked with, heard and offered a tender hand. And I can also learn that living this way can be costly, but that these forms of goodness are eternal and constantly reborn.

So, in the New Wave meeting I was further surprised to realise that it had taken me a ridiculously long time (I am 75) to see that my actions throughout life had been more or less in tune with this view of Jesus - through the lenses of offering possible actions and seeing everyone as of equal worth rather than through the stories of virgin birth, the manger, the actual cross, and so on.

I am further surprised by the arrival, as I write this, of *The Friend* with, on the front cover, these words: 'Jesus: the forgotten engine of Quaker Spirituality'. I told you I am often in the peloton.

So have I lived up to this offering of possible actions and equality? I hope I am getting there, and around me as models there are so many Friends in our meeting and elsewhere, and in other denominations and faiths, who direct their lives towards others, towards pacific ideas for a better world, and towards the good.

One such is Ursula Franklin, a Friend not well-known in this country but well-known in Canada. Look her up on Wikipedia if you are interested in a Quaker, pacifist, feminist thinker, writer and activist. I am going to read the *Ursula Franklin Reader* as my personal New Wave resolution and invite others to join me in an online reading group - maybe this is also a contribution to a New Wave of groups and I hope the idea does not get lost in a welter of doodle polls.

If, after reading her Wikipedia page, you find you might like to read some of her writings with others, please contact me: annewatson1089@gmail.com.

EAPPI talk in Oxford Meeting House 19th January

Gwithian Doswell

Palestine and Israel have been much in the news in recent weeks, and rightly so. Aid agencies who have been working in conflict zones for decades are saying that the humanitarian situation in Gaza is the worst they have ever encountered. And yet, as this issue of '43' goes to press, the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, in retaliation for the October 7th Hamas attacks on Israeli civilians and military personnel, continues unabated. Quaker organisations around the world are calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, and for humanitarian protections for civilians. On 19th January, our Friend, Ian Cave, from Charlbury Meeting, will give a personal presentation in Oxford Meeting House about his time as a human rights monitor with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) last year. He was based in Hebron, in the West Bank.

Quakers in Britain have a long history of working for peace in Palestine and Israel. As part of this commitment, Quakers manage the UK and Ireland part of the EAPPI programme on behalf of Churches Together and other partner agencies. Members of Oxford Meeting regularly contribute to EAPPI with individual donations and through financial to Quaker Peace and Social Witness.

When engaged in peace-building, it is always important to acknowledge and tackle the roots of violence and conflict. The decades-long occupation of the Palestinian territories is a major cause of continuing physical and structural violence and suffering. Quakers in Britain believe that the occupation must end if there is to be a much, much needed peace for Palestinians and Israelis alike. On Friday 19th January Ian Cave will share with us what he witnessed of daily life under Israeli military occupation before the current upsurge in violence and he will talk about actions we can all take to support the establishment of a sustainable and just peace in the region. Do come along in person to hear what Ian has to say. If you can't make it to the Meeting House, we hope you will join by Zoom on the Afterwords link, open from 7.15pm:



**Life in the West Bank under
the Israeli occupation:
First hand witness**

A talk by Ian Cave

Who spent three months in 2023 as a Human Rights Monitor

Friday 19 January, 7pm for 7.30pm

**Oxford Quaker Meeting House, 43 St Giles,
Oxford, OX1 3LW**

Free entry, donations to EAPPI Quakers in Britain Charity welcome.

Also on Zoom.

 Ecumenical
Accompaniment
Programme
in Palestine
and Israel

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89355942467?pwd=MHZEZmF3UWVwVGtqRnFuMDlqd mwr dz09>

Afterword Meeting ID: 893 5594 2467.
You may need to enter the Passcode: oxford
If you are dialling in on the phone, the
passcode is: 476863
+44 203 481 5240 United
Kingdom +44 203 901 7895 United
Kingdom.

NOTE: Friends may find that the 18 min-long video, 'Britain in Palestine, 1917-1948' useful in providing historical context. It can be viewed on the Balfour Project website: <https://balfourproject.org/film-of-britain-in-palestine-1917-1948/>

Quaker Video in this Month's Forty-Three

The Prayer Life of Quakers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZxGL2GQgZo>

6 Minutes and 16 Seconds



Photo of a tree in a field – unsplash.com

From Quaker Faith & Practice 27.42 Sacraments

Many Friends, involved with family and the wider society, keep Christmas; in some meetings, Easter and its meaning is neglected, not only at the calendar time but throughout the year. What I would hope for is neither that we let the testimony die, nor that we keep it mechanically. I hope for a rediscovery of its truth, that we should remember and celebrate the work of God in us and for us whenever God by the Spirit calls us to this remembrance and this joy.

January 2024

Many meetings and events are held via Zoom. Link for all Oxford Meetings for Worship:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87383304611?pwd=Vkkya2ZweVVRZjRmOE1JVDBFdTdwUTo>

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Please contact the Office for more details:

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OXFORD MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

Meetings for worship are via Zoom and/or in person.

For more information, contact the Office at

office@oxfordquakers.org +44 (0)1865 557373

First Sunday of each month:

Meeting for Worship 10:30-11:30 (in person & Zoom)

MfW for Business 12:15 (in person & Zoom)

All other Sundays:

Meetings for Worship 09:30-10:15 (in person and Zoom)

11:00-12:00 (in person and Zoom)

Monday:

Young Adult Friends 19:00-21:00 (in person and Zoom)

Tuesday:

Meeting for Worship 07:30-08:00 (in person only)

Wednesday:

Meeting for Worship 07:30-08:00 (Zoom only)

Meeting for Worship 11:30-12:15 (in person & Zoom)

Friday:

Meeting for Worship 07:30-08:00 (Zoom only)



Photo by J Henderson

HEADINGTON MEETING FOR WORSHIP

Headington Meeting meets each Sunday at 10:00
at Old Headington Village Hall,
Dunstan Road, Headington, OX3 9BY

For full details see

<https://headington.quakermeeing.org/>

The views expressed in **Forty-Three**
do not necessarily reflect those of the editors.

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Please send newsletter contributions by the 15th of the month, the submission deadline.

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