

The Quaker Universalist Group

The Quaker Universalist Group believes that spiritual awareness is accessible to men and women of any religion or none, and that no one Faith can claim to have a monopoly of truth. The group is open to both Quakers and non-Quakers.

About this pamphlet

On The Contrary, the title of this pamphlet, is typical of John Hemming's understanding of the nature of things. His view is that we were born in one-ness, but almost immediately duality takes over. We live our lives in two-ness, in opposites, in contraries and paradox. And all the time that dim knowledge of the original wholeness of everything, of that 'burning one-ness', still exists. We search for it, we long to be whole, and at last we may be able to let all the rubbish go and find that universal sense of the world lying below all the distractions and attractions of our disjointed lives.

John Hemming traces the foundations of all this from early childhood, and from his great experience as a teacher. The pamphlet opens with the unforgettable expressive play of a child: it was particularly unforgettable for John, though it occurred fifty years ago. The child held his teachers and his classmates in a timeless moment of one-ness, when all the contradictions are suspended.

The rest of the pamphlet is a reflection on this moment, and the experience of us all when the clouds of glory through which we are born give way to shades of the prisonhouse — and yet where the memory remains. It is all written in John's inimitable style, funny, witty and full of philosophy and wisdom. And it is bounded by two of his many hundreds of poems on the same theme, making a moving and thought-provoking whole in itself.

John Hemming died, very suddenly and unexpectedly, a week after completing this work. He had corresponded with us joyfully about it, and was very glad about the publication. We are so sorry about his death. But we are honoured to be able to produce this as a fitting memorial to him, one which we think he would have really liked. The mandala on the title page is his own wish.

ON THE CONTRARY

A Reflection on the Universal Light of Childhood

John Hemming



 QUG Pamphlet No.25

£2.30

About the author

John Hemming's earlier career was spent in teaching, with strong emphasis on drama. He never lost his delight in children, and their remarkable powers of learning and growing — when given the chance. In later years he chose the minimum of possessions, and long periods of silence, to refine the rhythms and word groupings with which he habitually awoke. A great deal of his writings have not been published so far. Those we know, convey his strong belief in the importance of discovering for ourselves the meaning of life within the mystery which encompasses us all. Laced with his delightful sense of humour, his prose and poetry seemed to many people wholly (or, his, wHoly?) unique.

Each Quaker Universalist pamphlet expresses the views of its author, which are not necessarily representative of the Q.U.G. as a whole.

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ON THE CONTRARY

A Reflection on the Universal Light of Childhood

by

one whom the world calls

John Hemming

**"Except ye . . . become as little children,
ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."**

Thanksgiving and Dedication

For Jack and Billy and all who spread
Love in the world without words.

There is a spirit which I Feel.

Can I, imprisoned, body-bound touch
The starry garment of the Oversoul,
Reach from my tiny part to the great Whole,
And spread my little to the Infinite Much,
When Truth forever slips from out my clutch,
And what I take indeed, I do but dole
In cupfuls from a rimless ocean bowl
That holds a million million million such?
And yet, some Thing that moves amongst the stars,
And holds the cosmos in a web of law
Moves too in me: a hunger, a quick-thaw
Of soul that liquefies the ancient bars,
As I, a member of creation, sing
The burning one-ness binding everything.

The Nayler Sonnets
Kenneth Boulding.

Two words of Caution

Words are deceptive. The map is not the territory, nor is the declaration of the fountain the fountain itself. You can no more identify with the mind of Christ by reading about it than you can eat a menu. So take heed, dear Friends, of Isaac Penington's words:-

"He that readeth these things, let him not strive to comprehend them; but be content with what he feeleth thereof to his own present estate, and as the life grows in him, and he in the life ... the words will of themselves open to him."



Throughout the text 'man' is mankind. Those who wish to read 'she' for 'he', 'her' for 'his', are welcome to do so. The God referred to will even accept 'it'.

Always Spring Corpus

If you think you are

anybody

seek on

until you find you are

somebody.

When you think you are

somebody,

seek on

until you find you are

nobody.

Only when you know you are

nobody

will Love in Person

convince you you are

everybody.

Now

and only now

taking no thought

can you affirm you are

everybody;

for now

and only now

will you know you are not

your body,

but the very love

from which every body must

always spring.

A Moment of Truth?

What I remember most vividly is the silence when it was over. The moment itself was timeless, so it is impossible to say how long it lasted. Fifty years ago it was, but in some strange way it lives still. Now.

Peter was nine. A very quiet boy, who had difficulty with the 3 R's. But he was a watcher and when we had a drama session at the end of an afternoon, he would enjoy watching the other children improvising their own plays in the small space in the centre of the classroom. For we had pushed the heavy iron desks to the walls - the only way we could create a large enough space in which things could happen.

There had been much relaxed laughter and several groups had finished their plays when Peter put up his hand.

"Please sir, can I do one?"

We were all surprised.

"Of course, Peter: Who with?"

"By myself, sir".

"Of course. What do you need?"

"Nothing, sir"

"Nothing?"

"Nothing". Then he added, "Only this".

This was a single desk. All the others were double and so heavy that when we moved them to the side of the room, we had to pretend they were unexploded bombs. They had to be moved with great care and in complete silence. This single desk had no iron frame, so was easily moved. Peter with no hesitation pulled it to the centre of the acting area and stepped back, so that it stood there alone on its four slim legs. We all sat round him on the other desks, shuffling and wondering what Peter was going to do.

"It's a very, very tall chimney," he explained, "and I've got to blow it up".

That is all he said. He looked at the ceiling as he said it, so we all knew how very tall it was.

At first our attention was fragmented. It was the end of an afternoon and some minds were already on their way home, but gradually things changed. The shuffling stopped when we saw Peter ignore his chimney. There were other things to be done first. He took from his pocket an invisible bunch of keys, carefully selected one and unlocked the door of a shed. This he opened and went in to collect the wherewithal for the work he had to do. Round his waist he strapped a belt obviously designed for the purpose and into it he began to

tuck various tools. There was an enormous coil of wire, I remember, which he coiled most professionally and some sticks of dynamite, which he extracted very cautiously from a heavy box on the floor of the hut. By the time he had locked the box and the door of the hut, we, the watchers were utterly silent and our attention riveted. Not one of us was now on the way home or even in the classroom. We were following Peter across to that chimney. And though it was Peter we were watching, we each felt it was us. And yet all so wrapped up in the danger that not one of us gave thought to the fact that if you are going to blow up a tall chimney you blow it up from the bottom. Peter with all his equipment was going to climb to the top. And everyone of us shared the danger. Each time his foot slipped there was a catch of breath and when he finally reached the crumbly top of the chimney and stood upright, we knew that a fall of several hundred feet lay below us.

Peter stood tall when he reached the top. Stood up and stretched after his muscle-aching climb. Then he began to unhook some of the equipment from his belt. He carefully put it down. He had trouble with the wire and for an awful moment we wondered if his balance was threatened.

Next he surprised us all by opening a small box and, sitting cross-legged, he quite calmly began to eat a sandwich, looking about him and apparently enjoying the astonishing view. This done, he stood up and began to study the brickwork, looking for cracks into which he might effectively plug his explosive. And it was as he was doing this that the tension really began to build. Several times a small jerk in his body made us aware that all was not well. A slight slip of one foot or a quick movement of one arm to ensure a firm grip. Then he stood up to his full height and bent to pick up the huge coil of wire he had been carrying. One end he attached to the charge in the chimney, and then, standing up, he threw the coil out into the air, so that we saw it falling and uncoiling as it went. We all followed it down with Peter's eyes. And he leaned over to watch it.

Whether it was because all eyes were on the wire and not on Peter I cannot say, but suddenly our eyes were back on him. He had stood up and stepped back and realised he had gone too far.

I cannot describe the timeless moment he fought to regain his balance. Neither can I describe his fall. Nowadays television would show the whole thing in slow motion. His fall was in fact the height of a child's desk. But it seemed interminable and when Peter lay face down spread-eagled on the floor, the stillness and the silence seemed to last forever.

It was broken by the bell for the end of school. Usually I had all the desks back by then, ready for the next day. But not that afternoon. And to this day the stillness of that small figure and the silence of the 40 children and one adult who had died with him remains as vivid in my memory as any moment of truth in my experience of real life.

Recollection of early Childhood

The whole drama of life is built on twoness. Not oneness. Without the twoness of opposites in conflict there would be no drama. No tragedy, no comedy, no good, no bad, no light, no darkness. A 'cosmic yawn of boredom' perhaps. We have always been in conflict with ourselves and others, ever seeking Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. We have always been seeking to conjoin all opposites into Oneness. Male and Female in Holy Matrimony. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. The search continues for a Theory of Everything and now that man's very survival is threatened, we realise we must not only see the Oneness. Now we must Be it. We must be in the Oneness in life as surely as before we are born and after we die. All-ways. Our only choice is to have no choice. It is a mystery, which we are here to solve.

All creation springs from The Seed, The Oneness, from the Creator with whom we are co-creators - and all so-called death returns us to that oneness, even though in life, through error, we have separated ourselves from it. It is therefore of the Essence ('Being' in its True sense) that we are first aware of that oneness and thenceforth in Time, in our time on earth, remain in it. For this is the true oneness of Nature, the oneness of True Love, the oneness of God, who is *not* other. All that is not God is other. Thought, word or deed not born of Love is other and so out of the oneness that is Truth. One is one and All all-one, and evermore shall be so.

What follows is an attempt to identify the point where our oneness becomes twoness and to consider how that oneness can be restored. First so that the individual is no longer divided, and thence to the group. To the world. And so to the universe - if that be divided anywhere but in the mind of man ...

At birth, time, number and even our bodies are a mystery to us, but, as we discover them, little by little the mystery diminishes. Experience teaches us that what was incomprehensible nonsense makes sense after all. Those ten pink sausages that mysteriously seem to be thrusting themselves into consciousness, are at last experienced as my toes. I am hungry. I bellow. I discover the need for food. The life-long journey of self-discovery has begun.

Within the first few years of life I begin to discover that I am not my mother. She has a will, but so do I. And I am already beginning to recognise a twoness beyond the oneness in which I was born. I find myself in a world of I and Not I.

But I do not seek to return to the oneness into which I was born. I am far too busy trying to cope with all the dualities, the twoness, the endless opposites

into which I now find myself. Day needs night, hunger needs food, stillness needs movement, breathing in needs breathing out, inexperience needs experience - physical, mental, spiritual.

But it is to the physical I turn first. The ocular proof. I learn about my toes and my bodily functions before I learn about my mind. I learn about what I can see before I learn about what I cannot see. I learn to do what I am told before I learn about what to tell myself. Gradually I learn that I must choose. I learn obedience. But to whom? To the I?, or the Not I?

Not only do I begin to learn about the bag of skin and bones which is I, but also about everything outside it. The world. Mother, father, cat, nappies. Sight, sound, smell, touch, taste. Senses. These I am encouraged to develop in every possible way. And because all these things outside me are apparently essential to life, I learn to absorb them as necessary to my being, to my growth as a whole person. I learn about possessions and their importance to my eventual emergence as an educated individual, who can fend for himself and earn his own 'living'.

Soon the oneness (or should it be 'nothingness?') I knew at birth is challenged, not only by the experience of mother, father and probably brothers and sisters, but of the still wider circle of school.

By now I have experienced, absorbed and accepted many of the opposites which arrive with birth - day and night, hot and cold, fast and slow, big and small, far and near, loud and soft, clean and dirty - and behind it all a difference between Yea and Nay, Right and Wrong. There is now a recognition however unconscious, that besides the physical, there is within this I, a thinker, who perforce to survive, must be a chooser.

I can cope with the bodily functions - put in food and get rid of waste - without help. Dress, undress with clothes provided and washed for me. Play with my toys. Do what I like - if it is what mother, father, child-minder likes. And now there is a 'teacher'.

Whoever has fed me since I was born and kept me alive with clothes and shelter, I have from that first moment possessed two holes in this bag of skin of mine which have always been predominant in deciding where my attention should be focussed. My two eyes. Supported by my other senses, these two eyes and their direction have been at the root of all my experience - the recognition of my mother, my source of food, warmth, Love, survival - and upon her largely has depended the direction of my attention.

From birth someone has directed my attention to where 'they' wanted it to be. Towards them - a loving look, a smile towards a rattle, a teddy bear, a

mobile, a musical box, or perhaps towards a screen whose ever changing colours and images seem to provide substitutes for every experience under the sun. Not only endless images but endless sounds as well. Surely a centre of attraction as well as a centre of attention. And a centre of attention that provides choice. My father and mother choose where the centre of their attention lies as well as mine. Fast cars, maybe, explosions, fighting or 'show-biz'. Or what they refer to as Nature or Wild life or Gardening or News.

By now I am learning to see with my mother's eyes, with my father's eyes, perhaps with my brother's and sister's and other people's eyes as well. My eyes see what they see and what others want me to see and, so long as we all see together in harmony and Love, all is well. We adapt to one another, we share each others' pleasure and pain.

School begins and the teacher knows what is best for us, makes sure that our attention is directed aright. Or perhaps the teacher only thinks he knows what is best for us. Perhaps the teacher has been told what to teach by someone else who knows what is best for us. Or even how to teach. Perhaps the teacher feels he knows how to teach because he was taught so badly himself. Perhaps he is teaching because he was taught so wonderfully. Or possibly, just possibly, he is teaching because he knows he has not yet learnt and he knows that learning to learn *with* is more important than learning to teach *to*.

But let us not be distracted. The aim of this discourse is to explore the right direction of attention and if possible to discover the Centre of Attraction from which all else is distraction. Or, if there is one, the centre of distraction from which all else is attraction. Are these in fact two centres to our little lives or only one? For right from the start we feel instinctively that we were right from the start. Trailing clouds of glory have we come bearing the light that lights everyone who comes into the world. But right from the start we now feel something was wrong from the start. Nothing, said St. Paul, can separate us from the Love of God. But clearly something has. Were we born of the flesh and not of the spirit? Is that what it was? Is it the sins of the fathers visited upon the sons all the way back to Adam, that have caused this separation? And here I am, here we all are within five years of birth having our brains filled with all that an errant civilisation feels is necessary for its continuation.

Numeracy, literacy, science and sex are of paramount importance. Age, abilities, aptitudes. What precedes what now that I am made ready for 'education'? Where now is the centre of attention? If it is not in the centre of me as Truth - both inside and outside Time - where can it possibly be? What is the point of learning to count and to read and to write and to manipulate nature if I

can see no one centre to all these activities? They are pieces of a jig-saw puzzle with no certainty that they belong to the same picture.

Life for a child born into the twentieth century is not a matter of being presented with a single jig-saw puzzle - with or without the picture on the lid. To-day the child is presented with a vast assortment of jig-saw pieces taken from a thousand puzzles - most of them vying with each for the colour and rightness which will be most attractive to the child and so tempt him to identify and complete it before all the others - every puzzle an -ology or an -ism. And the confusion is so vast that neither parent, nor teacher, nor even the government controlling both has ever seen all the jig-saws completed and so never yet discovered if, when completed, they all fit together into One. For nature has decreed that there are no straight edges, no helpful corner-pieces to define a beginning or an ending.

For 300 years scientists have been sawing up jig-saw pieces into smaller and smaller pieces until every piece is reduced to the size of an atom or even smaller. Not only this, but many pieces have been re-assembled to form unnatural objects from pieces formerly wholly natural, so that the child entering the twenty-first century is hard put to it to distinguish the natural from the unnatural.

We begin life whole and by the time school begins we are already as fragmented as the world with which we are confronted. Our wholeness has already led us to identifications, beyond the oneness into which we were born, into proliferating egos, enabling us to empathise with mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents perhaps, and other little adventurers into the world like ourselves. We are different from them all and yet we are the same.

Now that school begins we have teachers, who have different boxes of jig-saw puzzles - not only representing different subjects, but graded to help us to acquire the skills and knowledge we shall eventually need to earn our living in the world. Indoctrination has begun in earnest. We must learn to read, to write, to measure, to count. To understand Science. And henceforth we shall have more and more experts in every field to lead us onward to train us in the methodical use of all the apparatus their experience has shown them will lead us to deepen our knowledge. Television, radio, video, computers. Science laboratories and every possible means of providing us with the ocular proof we need to understand the world and keep up with 'the leading edge of science'.

But let us not be distracted. The aim of this discourse is to explore the right direction of attention and if possible to discover the Centre of Attraction from which all else is distraction. For clearly if everyone operates from a

different Centre the result can only be conflict and chaos. This thesis seeks to be a thesis of Truth and it seeks to show that Truth and its antithesis emerge from and converge to the same Centre, the One and only Centre where there is neither conflict nor chaos.

If my elders and betters have been right (or even wrong?) from the start in leading me to believe that "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us", I am bound to live my life in the acknowledgement that I must live with two centres - a true one and a false one - ever torn between the two wills.

The duality which began soon after birth I begin to recognise in others. My physics teacher is so interested in identifying pieces of the physics jig-saw that he has little interest in the jig-saw of my French teacher. No one it seems - not even the Head Teacher himself - knows all about everything - only that everything cannot be taught or for that matter learnt - whatever a government may tell him. The children in his charge may leave him armed with as much knowledge as they have been able to absorb; they may be able to identify many pieces of many jig-saws and be able to assemble much of them, but do they realise there is one jig-saw they must assemble before all the rest? The one wholly original jig-saw which is one self? One's True Self?

Shades of the Prison-house

"What is Truth?" asked jesting Pilate and would not stay for an answer. So wrote Francis Bacon. And Shakespeare wrote of "poison in jest", for humour is a great concealer of life as well as a great revealer. Once sucked into the great vacuum-cleaner of life we have no time to stay for an answer. We are sucked into the darkness with the dust and it is all we can do to extricate ourselves. We may spend our entire lives searching for a way back to the light which we feel lighted us when we came into the world. Like sheep we have gone astray and, quite unwitting, like sheep we have followed other sheep who have lost their shepherd, but are quite content until disaster strikes. Somehow we move off-centre. Life was once an eternal Yea. Suddenly there is a Nay. And life becomes what seem to be a series of Yeas and Nays unpredictable in their frequency.

"When I look at a child", write Jacob Moreno, "I see Yes, yes, yes, yes. They do not have to say Yes. *Being born is yes*".⁽¹⁾

It has been ever thus with nations as well as individuals. There have been wars and rumours of wars. Nations have risen and fallen, empires grown and disintegrated. Time that antiquates antiquity has brought endless birth and endless death, beginnings and endings and breakings and mendings. The map of a single mind has been as changeable as the map of the world itself. More and more of it has been discovered; more and more of it has been polluted, cluttered with excessive cumber, undernourished and dis-eased. The more man has proliferated his Nays and spread them across the world with trumpets and guns, the more easy has it been for others to spot the decreasing Yeas and so, themselves armed with trumpets and guns go fighting in or to 'preserve' them, proliferating the Nays in the process. It is only impurity which demands purification - a truth that applies as much to the mind of man as to the water he drinks.

The impurity begins in the mind where the Nays are, in Time, for ever in conflict with the Yeas. In Time.

In Time. But the aim here being pursued is the re-cognition of Wholeness, so the question to be asked is whether wholeness includes timelessness as well as time - not as an opposite but as part of our consciousness that we have not sufficiently explored. For there is no denying that if anyone makes a decision which lacks wholeness of vision and a vision of wholeness, that decision will be itself a fragmentation of whole Truth. It will be partial.

The brick the builder requires for his building may lead him to order a thousand more like it, but the stone the builder rejected may be the very corner stone of the whole.

Each of the infinite number of diameters of a circle has two ends, but only the centre of that circle not only belongs to them all, but has no end. Position but no magnitude. And what a position! A position without opposites which cannot be denied. As it is written in the Tao Te Ching:

*Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub
It is the centre that makes it useful.*⁽²⁾

Historically, there is little doubt that man discovered how to draw a circle in the sand with a loop of rope put over a peg and pulled tight to form a radius, long before he discovered he could draw an ellipse simply by adding a second peg some distance from the first inside his loop of rope. The circle has so many magical properties that it can be of no surprise to mankind to discover that it has been the foundation of mandalas, which have sprung out of our unconscious mind across cultures and continents across the world for thousands of years. Long before the Christian era it had been said that God's centre is everywhere and his circumference nowhere. However we define that 'God', or even if we don't, none of us can deny that the nature of the cosmos is self-balancing and anything that balances must have a common Centre to which all is connected.

*The planets themselves and this centre
Observe degree, priority and place.*⁽³⁾

Whatever we may mean by purpose, none can deny the order behind the movement of the stars in heaven or the order of the seasons upon earth. The evidence of creation both outside and inside man continues unabated. As, of course, does evidence of destruction. And it is the destruction that brings us into the world of opposites and reminds us that we are once more faced with the twoness into which we were born.

Here we are claiming that we are born out of a Universal Oneness into a world which perforce brings us out of timelessness into time, out of nowhere unto here, created hour by hour to ripe and ripe and then hour by hour to rot and rot as surely as must a primrose, an apple, or an elephant. Before birth we have no choice. We are born and, seemingly unlike the primrose the apple, or the elephant, we have choice. We die. Again we have no choice.

But none can choose if there is no choice. And in choice lies the challenge of everyone born out of timelessness into time. For in time timelessness still exists. We live in a world of either/or and both/and, the former in the twoness of choice, the latter in an inclusiveness in which there is no choice. A mind, clearly bodiless, manages the universe, but a mind, clearly with a body, manages me. Great minds think alike, they say. So not unnaturally we can all ask "Is my mind in perfect harmony with all Nature? With the universe? With this God whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere? Is my centre his centre? Her centre? Have I one centre wholly at one with the Creator of everyone and everything? Or have I two centres, making an ellipse or an even more un-balanced, multcentred figure?" For surely any choice I make from any other than my True Centre is theologically sin. Certainly, however well meant, it must be mistaken and I am unwittingly to a greater or lesser degree knocking the harmony of nature off balance. If a million trees in a rain forest are silently and without choice fulfilling the purpose for which they were made, what of a million human beings who having the gift of choice, decide from a different Centre to tear down these trees? Is it not obvious that if the balance of man's mind is disturbed, so is the balance of nature? Surely the Creator of All, including trees and human beings, is essential to the cosmic balance? Is it not possible that this same Creator has been using nuclear power for thousands of millennia to hold his Creation in 'balance with no' dangerous waste'? And that mankind has set up his own centre above his own Creator's in countless acts of supreme and monstrous arrogance? If no one knows his own mind, how can he know anyone else's? How can peace even exist in the world if there is endless conflict within the human mind? Even proud democracy assumes government and opposition, because so-called reality recognises the essential two-ness that time imposes on the human mind.

In the last 300 years there has been little attention paid to the possibility, let alone the necessity of transcending this way of seeing. As soon as Truth is split into two, one half of the equation is developed at the expense of the other. If the two halves of our brains are split, one half is developed at the expense of its opposite and balance is lost.

To-day it is common knowledge that the two hemispheres of our brains work the opposite sides of our bodies and that the left brain copes with our thinking, our analysis, our words, our numbers, our reasoning, while the right in general copes with synthesis, the creative, the artistic, the intuitional side of our lives. It is equally well known that across the earth over eighty per cent of the human population is right-handed. And has been for at least 10,000 years. This

would suggest a remarkable imbalance in man, which is not reflected in general in nature herself. And it raises the question whether in Truth - that is in Nature, with man as part of her or not - man has been and still is looking upon the natural world in an imbalanced way. What he has been seeing as important - the ocular proof he has been seeking for so long - may be much less important than he thinks. His every distortion of nature, his every splitting of the natural world to reveal new information is in fact creating more and more pieces, which render the whole jig-saw puzzle more and more unrecognisable. If this over-developed left-brain of his is unbalancing him more and more, it is surely unbalancing the world he is creating outside him. All this analysis of the earth in which he lives has taken place, before the primary synthesis has been sought, let alone found - his own true wholeness. His own true holiness. Long before he 'takes his place in the world' as a responsible citizen his oneness has been lost, his being 'as a little child' is lost or corrupted by the twoness he has developed. The ego, which was at one with the universal Love from which he came, has by adolescence developed into many egos. His vision is as fragmented as the world he finds himself creating. The continuing creation contains within itself the continuing destruction. Some are born of the flesh, some of the spirit. And whether or not the sins of the fathers are visited upon their children even unto the third and fourth generation, the first aim of every conscious human being must surely be to become wholly aware of our true identity and so to restore our own wholeness and oneness with our creator and with the creation in which we live.

Since the beginning of wisdom, 'Know Thyself' has been the essential call of the wise of every culture under the sun. "This above all, to thine own self be true. Seek first the kingdom of Heaven" is synonymous with "Seek first to restore the light that lighted you when you came into the world, the light of truth from whatever quarter it may come". For Truth cannot be gainsaid. Its light cannot be put out. And for however long our bodies survive on this planet, it must be our primary task to seek it, to find it and having found it to BE it. And being it demands one Centre, not two.

But how can this be possible? The so-called Christian is told he is a miserable sinner from the start! Adam chewed an apple and was driven from Eden as Satan was drive from Heaven. So are we! And only in Heaven is this oneness to be found. If we say we have no sin the truth is not in us, but if we say we have sin, we are forgiven - just so long as we keep on confessing our sins. Catch 22. Here is a life-time's oscillation between the oneness of whole Truth and the twoness of truth and error.

So here we have all the humanity on planet earth - from the deep dreaming of the aborigine peoples to the scholarship of the Western world, coming out of timelessness into time and into a world of opposites between which every one of us must make choices. The earth rolls on. Nature evolves. There are wars and rumours of wars. Apparently unending conflict between opposites.

The question we are exploring here is simply this: Is it possible for the human mind in the here and now to be so set free from conflict that it can find eternal peace? Not lasting peace. Eternal Peace. Peace in Truth.

If the answer to this question is Yes, many other questions follow. Do we want it? Can we choose it? Do we choose not to choose it? Is there in fact a Centre of Truth to everyone and everything? And if there is a Theory of Everything, can it be written on a piece of paper? Or is it simply - an experience? Being Truly who we are? WHoly - yet ineffably who we Truly ARE?

On the Contrary

We began with the magic spell cast by an almost illiterate nine year old. So simply and so vividly did he become a creation of his own imagination that some 40 others let go and wholly identified with him. Place, time and things created themselves in our own minds as Peter gave 'to airy nothings a local habitation and a name'. We were all One.

"Without contraries," said William Blake, "there is no progression."

"Every endeavour of our human intelligence," said Nicholas of Cusa, "should be bent to the achieving of that simplicity where contradictories are reconciled."

"Seek first the kingdom of heaven ... The kingdom of heaven is within you... Except ye be as little children ye shall not enter into it."

If there is to be any progression at all, it must surely be towards a heaven on earth, in which we are all one and free from the conflict of contraries. A world in which we all share One Centre, all guided by one universal Guide.

At once we are in the realm of paradox. How can there be contraries in oneness, oneness in contraries? And any who dare to call themselves universalists must in the name of Truth investigate this paradox, so with the help of a simple child, let us seek to do it.

First, let us notice that Peter brought us all into oneness without language. His creation sprang from silence. Only a strident school bell brought us back to earth. A second point is perhaps more significant. It lies in the confusion immediately caused by the use of words. You have just read of 'heaven on earth', of being brought back to earth and of a world in which we all share one Centre. Is the earth the world? The world the earth? Assuredly The World Atlas depicts the earth. The earth the bell brought us back to was the earth that we were living upon. But what of your world? My world? Peter's world? The world of virtual reality? From the moment of birth every human being begins to create its own world and every one of them is different; and yet every one of us is treading the same earth. And every world from the moment of our birth is going to be crammed with contraries, opposites from which each one of us must choose every day of our lives. Yea or Nay. For beyond Yea and Nay, said Jesus, is evil.

So we find ourselves all on one earth, but in millions of different worlds, each having to choose between fragmentations of our own wholeness. No wonder that science, which has for so long been splitting the earth down to its

tinest waves and particles is now in all its disciplines turning its attention to the almighty question: What is consciousness? What is wholeness? What is this Oneness? For whatever it is, our survival, yes the earth's survival depends upon it.

And here is Peter, who can't do his sums and can't read very well and whose world is little more than school and a poor home, drawing us all into a world where his deeds and dreams are one. Here there was no separation, no opposition.

"I cannot totally grasp all that I am," said St. Augustine. "The mind is not large enough to contain itself." Yet we all grasped who Peter was as surely as he did. Where was the creation coming from? Can fiction be Yea and fact Nay? For surely the kingdom of heaven on earth is as great a fiction as ever it was - unless perhaps the whole of humanity can experience a Damascan flash, a sudden 'religious experience' which wholly alters all our lives.

There is a story of St. Francis toiling homeward at the end of a hard day, followed by Brother Leo. As they trudge up the hill Francis asks Leo "What is Perfect Joy?" At first Francis tells him what Perfect Joy is not - all knowledge, of science, of scripture, of languages, of magic, of healing, of possession, of money. (He might have added with Eckhart "Time, the body and number!") Until at last Brother Leo, wearied by the list, says, "Please, Brother Francis, tell me: What IS Perfect Joy?" Doubtless today Leo would have had to wait for aeroplanes, cars, television, computers and the rest to be added, but Francis simply told him that if when they reached home they were rejected, spat on and beaten up - that would be Perfect Joy. Only by suffering what our dear Lord suffered for Love, he said, can we possibly learn to be such love ourselves. Identification with the mind of Christ was paramount - the only wholeness, the only oneness. We are each as wholly unique as every other wholly natural creation, but only by experiencing the Oneness of Love can we be ALL One.

Francis was sharing with Leo an imagined moment of truth. So was Peter, who, as little children do, lived and died as someone else within a time span of a few minutes. It is unlikely that Brother Leo shared Francis's vision of Perfect Joy, but in some strange way we all shared Peter's vision. It rang true. The creation came through Peter, but it was vividly shared. A collective consciousness. But shared only momentarily. Is this who God is? A consciousness, who silently observes - not only Peter and his classmates, but the whole world. The world, the earth, the universe. All that is. And all that isn't as well? Simply The Creator. All in One. Who can be conscious of a consciousness like that?

So where does this consciousness begin? When God said, Let there be Light? Or does it begin when we are born - the light that lighteth everyone who comes into the world? Is consciousness of our awareness gradual?

*I died a mineral and became a plant;
I died a plant and rose an animal;
I died an animal and I was a man.
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
Yet once more shall I die as a man to soar
With the blessed angels; but even from angelhood
I must pass on - All except God perishes.
When I have sacrificed my angel soul,
I shall become that which no mind ever conceived.
O let me not exist! For non-existence proclaims,
"To him we shall return!"*

So wrote Rumi 700 years ago. And none of us can deny that consciousness grows with experience. But does love grow with the consciousness brought with our knowledge of the world? The earth? Nature? Does consciousness grow in breadth? In depth? In wisdom? In wholeness? Is head-knowledge the same as self-knowledge? As we hurtle towards the millennium, are we becoming conscious of our imminent, immanent discovery of Perfect Joy? That which is eternal?

As ever the answer lies in the question. It lies in the simplicity of Peter, of Francis, of Jesus, of Truth. For the great Word of Comfort for those whose total commitment is to Truth is that Truth IS. Truth always is. Truth will out because Truth is in - even if we deceive ourselves into thinking we are wholly true. Nature's will is God's will whatever the enormity of man's arrogance in his distortions and attacks upon her. Where the light shines in the darkness the darkness is dispelled. We are beginning to see that if we are to accept truth in its wholeness, we must reverse the trend of centuries and defend nature against humanity, no longer humanity against nature. More. It is a defence we must love to die for, die to love for. This dying as a mineral to become a plant and then dying as a plant is simply the growth of consciousness - from elementary particle to humanity and beyond into "that which no man conceived".

For Truth is here all the time. If man thinks he must cross the globe to find it or even rocket to the moon he is sorely mistaken. Most probably, like the prodigal son, he has to go away only to discover that he has to come back. He

may think he must have 'ocular proof' but it may be as tragically deceptive as Desdemona's handkerchief was to Othello. We must be able to see the Earth as 'a precious jewel floating in the depth of space' or our dear island as 'a precious stone set in a silver sea' without rocketing into space to prove it. The inner eye must be sufficient. If we are writing of consciousness, of images, of self-deception and Truth, let us take heed of George Fox's words to Lady Claypole when she lay in a dark depression. He told her not to focus on images, but on the light by which she could see that she was depressed, the very light without which none of us would see anything at all. This is the Light of Truth and if it is clouded over, the cloud is the cloud of our unknowing. Instead of reflecting the truth our egocentricity overcomes our ecocentricity and we live in a world of half-truths, of yea and nay beyond which is evil. For that of God in everyone is Yea and the multitudinous egos in each one of us, until they are all one in Love, remain Nay. When One, whose Power is over All speaks to our condition, we see in Truth how necessary the contraries were and are for progression. For however much we analyse, theorise and philosophise, progression is of small worth if it is moving away from the simplicity of One. Less is fraction, more is a multiple. It is God who is our home from whom we are born and to whom we must return. The twoness comes between and the Pattern that Connects is what we are on earth to discover. We are inclined to forget or not realise that the Pattern that Connects simply is because it always was. It is nature herself. It is the will of God always. It is that of God here now in all people, places and things. It is the Power of Love, which makes us co-creators. If one small child set in the midst of us can unify all around by being something other (or by being himself for that matter!), is it so important to know that his creativity is due to "the mind collapsing the wave function" or whether "the collapse is due to gravitational energy"? For if we don't know who we are, how can we possibly know what we are doing? And if we do not know what we do, maybe we are crucifying someone else instead of ourselves.

Perhaps there was more going on when Peter fell off that chimney than we realised. We were certainly shocked into dying with him - the terrible silence confirmed that - and yet almost at once we saw him resurrected. And we all went home.

From the new apocrypha comes a very similar story.

Jesus as a small boy was playing on a roof-top with some other children. One was a boy called Zenon. Zenon tripped as they played and fell to his death on the road below. Horror-stricken all the other children ran off. The parents of

the dead child came out to find Jesus alone, looking down at them from the roof.

"You did it!" they cried, "You pushed him off!"

"I did not push him," said Jesus. He came down at once and running to the dead Zenon, took him by the hand.

"I didn't push you off, did I?" he said.

"Of course not," said Zenon, standing up, "I tripped."

Yea or Nay? Fact or Fiction? Not in the Holy Bible, so not true? Just another charming story in which we suspend our disbelief?

We are in pursuit of the Oneness of All, so clearly every endeavour of our human intelligence must be bent to the achieving of that simplicity where contradictions are reconciled. Conscious and unconscious must be one. And all these contraries must be the very means of our progression towards it, it being the kingdom of heaven within you, which we cannot enter except we be as little children. And yet we must 'put away childish things'. Are things that are eternal childish things? All children play Let's Pretend; it's how we find out who we are. And who we aren't. What if a grown-up pretends to be Jesus? Rides along with his followers crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy", spreading garments before him? Do we shout "Holy, Holy, Holy" too? Or do we brand his forehead with a B for Blasphemer and bore his tongue through with a red-hot iron? For such was the fate of James Nayler. Was he being childish? Or child-like? Had he reconciled all the opposites within himself?

If it is historical fact that Nayler was so punished for acting out his identification with Jesus - after all, God had called him dramatically from his wife and children, while he was 'at the plow' - what did he think and feel after his punishment? "My spirit was quieted in that simplicity, in which I went," he told Margaret Fell after being rebuffed by Fox (simplicity again!), but more significant was this self-observation:

"I came to see that if I had been in his (i.e. Christ's) company here on earth, as long as his disciples were, in the flesh, and seen as much as they did, and heard from his own mouth, I should have been short of this work as they were in whom *the Child was unknown* when he went away in the flesh. And they knew not what spirits they were of until he came to them in spirit and was revealed in them."

That Child again! But this Child is the fountain light of all our seeing. It is the spiritual child re-born daily as we die daily. No notion, but an experience. Not a notional imitation of Christ, resulting from the indoctrinations we have received from others, but a sudden realisation that that of Love in everyone is

the love we all are, stripped of our self-deceptions. This newness of Life, this inflow/outflow of love is as simple and natural as the inflow/outflow of our own breath. It is given universally. It is the eternal life we live whether we are in our bodies or out of them. The Holy Love and Truth, which is everywhere where fear is not. The body may suffer pain - pain is an essential messenger - but to wholly be this Love is to be wholly Yea, is wholly to delight to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delight to endure all things. To identify with such Love is to reconcile all contraries. It is being Life in a world and on an earth, where death has no more dominion. Here we are as simple as children in a world, where we take no thought for what we eat, wear or speak, for we trust our love to reflect the wholeness of Truth, which only simplicity can recognise. And there is no greater simplicity than the Oneness of All.

Of all the scientists and philosophers, who have investigated Consciousness, one earned fame by asking the question, "What is it like to be a bat?" This is rather like riding on a donkey to see what it is like to be Jesus. But it helps us to pursue our theme and reflects Nayler's experience. Is that of God in everyone (so central to Quaker thinking) that of Jesus in everyone? If he was unique, so are we. So was little Peter. So was his demolition man. A fact and a fiction in one.

Now we are beginning to see that all our elementary particles are the same. What is like to be a bat? What is it like to be a ball? The centre of attention and attraction to millions weekly, if not daily, as they will it to follow their will. It is us and we are it. What is this consciousness? If it is all one, it is the long-sought Pattern that Connects, the Fact of Everything beyond the theory of Everything. It must be the unconscious as well as the conscious. More. It must be the Truth that sets us free. No longer is there separation. Now there are opposites, but no opposition. There is conscious learning, but unconscious learning as well. We are beginning to see that we are being taught by a love and truth beyond reason. The contraries without which there is no progression are leading us back to the same One Truth we have always suspected. Or is it forward? Both. For at last we see that it is All wholly now. Holy now. The Ever-Present. Truth. Now we can enjoy nonsense, for we see it makes sense. And now we can understand both we can answer the question "What's a meta for?" - the question asked at the end of "Angels Fear", the book published by his daughter after Gregory Bateson's death. For death overtook him after a lifetime's search for the Pattern that Connects through anthropology, biology and psychology. "Learn to think as nature thinks," he said. And we might add, learn to feel as nature feels, for in the universal wholeness All is One.

As we discover that the wholeness of Truth is ineffable - did not Peter, like God, reveal it in silence? - so we discover that only through metaphor can we approximate it in words. The letter killeth because it is not the spirit. The greatest psychoneuroimmunologist may speak and write about the microtubules and synapses in the brain in his efforts to be truthful, but he will still talk about the sunrise instead of being scientifically correct and talking about earthfall. None of us can be wholly literal, but we can and must be aware of who we are. Of our not knowing as well as our knowing; that our great knowing in one direction may be a massive unknowing in another, and that only by letting go and empathising with the whole of nature, with God, can we be more than a vast committee of egos unanimous in their assessment of our own importance. Not recognising our true selves in the crowd is the cloud of our unknowing. The Light of the outer sun and inner Son is One, but in One Way Only can we know this - through experience.

Forgiving and forgetting is so much more important than the giving and getting of things. To be universal we must love adventurously, until to be as poor as the rich is to be as rich as the poor. Until our lives are a testament of devotion to the lives of others. Until nothing matters, because everything matters. Until nature harnesses man to unharness himself of his own greed for speed. Until her good is his good. Until I am so emptied that I am fulfilled by Love. This is the conjunction of all the contraries, which provide the progression to the Universal Wedding - even the Marriage of Heaven and Hell. This is the eternal Yea, when the ocean of light shines over the ocean of darkness and our unknowing is no more clouded. For that cloud was fear and all it was hiding was the Love who all the time was here and now.

As it was in the beginning is now. Peter died. We all died with him. And as little children we can all die daily and be resurrected. To be this love is to be one's true self. Here that of God, the world, the earth, the universe is All One.

But is it I who makes the choice? On the contrary.



Meeting

"The more I seek," I said, "I find
A kind of darkness in my mind;
It's full of egos deep inside,
Craving to be gratified,
While all that's Light and True and Free
Is clearly that of God in me;
These egos battle with my soul,
Preventing me from being whole.
All this conflict, fear and doubt
Prevents the Light from shining out."

I paused. He smiled and then replied,
"At least you recognise your pride.
Every human being on earth
Plays many different parts from birth -
A cast of actors, who will rage
Or laugh or weep upon the stage
Of one small life.
And so by artificial light
We all perform. And yet the night
Of ignorance remains. The Light within
Is shrouded in a cloak of sin.
But once you love and seek to be
All the Truth and Love you see,
I promise you, you'll see afar
The person who you really are.
By letting go your inner fear
Your legion egos will career
Like swine possessed and hurtle down -
One quantum leap and they will drown.
The person who you really are
Will then behold you from afar
And, filled with Joy - you'll see him - run
And in a flash you both are One."

He ceased.

"You say that I am he?"

I asked. "Can such things be?"

Can you and I and ALL be One?"

But he had gone. I was allone.

References

Many quotations have so woven themselves into the text that no attempt has been made to identify them all. Those numbered are as follows:

1. *The Essential Moreno*. Ed. Jonathan Fox. New York, Springer Publishing, 1987.
2. *Tao Te Ching*. Chapter XI. Gia Fu Fen. Pub. Wildwood.
3. *Troilus and Cressida*. Act 1, Scene 3.