



# THE YOUNG QUAKER

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*Spirituality Issue*



“Spiritual learning continues throughout life, and often in unexpected ways. There is inspiration to be found all around us, in the natural world, in the sciences and arts, in our work and friendships, in our sorrows as well as in our joys. Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come? Do you approach new ideas with discernment?”

Quaker Faith and Practice 1:02 07

# News

## YFGM for Trans Inclusion

In November YFGM held a gathering on what action YFGMers, trans or cis, should take to ensure that the Quaker community is welcoming and affirming of trans people in the face of the unfounded fears and misinformation spread about them. This was made even more urgent as some meeting houses hosted events promoting transphobic views which are certainly not in-keeping with Quaker values. In May YFGM considered how to respond to this situation and discerned YFGM should look into how it can effectively act for trans inclusion at a special gathering.

At Chester Meeting House, Friends discussed their hopes and concerns on this subject with the trans Friends sharing their experiences. They looked at actions that individuals and YFGM as a whole, could take to ensure trans inclusion within British Quakerism. Finally Friends drafted a value statement sent to YFGM for discernment with the hope it will be adopted and sent to Meeting for Sufferings.

## Meeting for Sufferings Update

Meeting for sufferings (MfS), the national representative council for British Quakers, has met twice since TYQ's October deadline. Themes of inclusion, sustainability and governance were what defined MfS' discernment.

Demands for an inclusive community were voiced in the new national inclusion coordinator's report, the two year experiment of four extra young adult MfS reps and the ministry of YFGM's reps. New structures for BYM's commitment to sustainability were approved and all committees have to report what they are doing to promote sustainability. There was much discernment on national Quaker governing structures as tensions emerged over moves to centralise decision making in some areas. MfS will certainly return to these important issues in future meetings.

## Roots of Resistance spreads throughout the country

A Quaker network building a mass Quaker response to the world's largest arms fair has grown rapidly as Friends throughout the country join. DSEI is a huge gathering of all the companies & armed forces who profit and promote the bloody crimes of militarism. The Roots of Resistance is building a network of 100 Quakers in Area Meetings around the country. These "organisers" will in turn attempt to find 10 or more Quakers in their local area, to get involved in Roots of Resistance to take action against this central nexus of the murderous structures that enable war.

The response to Roots of Resistance's call has been amazing as so many Friends want to truly live the peace testimony by organise this mass Quaker act of witness. If you want to get involve please signing up at: <https://rootsofresistance.org.uk/get-involved/sign-up/>

## They shall laugh with slight more comfortable backs

Something previously thought unbelievable has happened at the February 2019 YFGM gathering. A tradition that has been a defining element of what it means to experience a YFGM event has been broken. In the heart of rural Staffordshire the rumours that have been flying around for months will be confirm.

In the Kibblestone international scout camp just outside the market town of Stone YFGMers will no longer have the their level of night time comfort defined by the inequality of how good their camping mattress is. No longer will they have to be fearful of being stepped on in the dark of night. No longer will they have to improvise pillows out of towels and meeting house seat cushions. The YFGM budget maybe quite a bit smaller but YFGMers' spinal muscles will be that much better. This YFGM gathering there will be BEDS FOR ALL. Oh happy days.

# Quakerism: the path to Paganism?

*Chloe Scaling writes what it is to be a quaker and a pagan*

I once saw a seventeenth century anti-Quaker book with a title like above (without the question mark). I didn't expect it to be true for me, I simply thought it was an amusing title. Quakers have been depicted wearing pointed hats like a witches, and the phrase "that of God in everyone" implies an extension of God into the earth. A sort of link has always been there.

Quakerism is really attractive to me due to the religious freedom it offers. You don't have to be Christian, believe in one God or any god at all. I've often felt unsure about what I believe, and Quakerism allows that. However, I've recently drifted from Quakerism in a way. Moving house three times has meant I've not been settled enough to go to meeting regularly meaning exploring paganism on my own has been easier than engaging actively in Quakerism.

This doesn't mean I'm not a Quaker any more as the dual religious identity of Quaker pagan (Quagan) suits me. Many Quakers share this mixture of spiritual traditions but somehow, I feel Quagan is not as accepted as other Quaker dualisms. "Pagan" conjures up the occult, dark magic and pre-Christian "heathens". This article is an attempt to break the silence a little, and be honest as a Quagan.

I believed, even before finding paganism, in some sort of force of the universe, of nature and the world rather than one god. In my journey with paganism, I've learnt that some forms of witchcraft emphasise the power of the universe through the elements and the spirit.

My pagan practice feels more practical, physical and embodied than my Quakerism. For me, the spiritual side of being a Quaker is going to meeting and waiting and listening to ministry. So developing my own pagan practices acted a kind of substitute for meeting but something more helping me to feel grounded in a time of flux.

My paganism more explicitly involves more senses than Quaker practices. It's about feeling the presence

of crystals in hand or pocket, smelling and seeing incense or essential oils burn and speaking out loud invoking the elements. Quakerism doesn't seem to offer such things for me.

Paganism has a materiality that Quakerism doesn't have. I love going into metaphysical shops and looking at the different crystals on display, taking a mental note of names I don't recognise and reading the little cards which explain how they can help.

Yet Quakerism and paganism share so much too. Silence and meditation is central to both with intuition being a particular useful concept for me. In Quaker meeting when you're listening, waiting and discerning whether to give spoken ministry, and as I'm learning about tarot and interpreting the cards I've come to rely on my own intuition and interpretations. Historically both the practices of tarot and unprogrammed Quaker meeting have long lineages going back centuries, which I feel deeply connected too.

Gender comes into this too. Quakers are good in terms of gender equality, but the witchy paganism I've found is dominated by women. I think that part of the reason I find it attractive is that it's a way of reclaiming a space in a patriarchal society. Not only have I reclaimed space by choosing to be a witch, but by reclaiming the title of Witch, it feels like I'm doing something subversive and rebellious. Disturbingly, I've found that some books can be very gender essentialist and talk lots about witches and wombs, as if you have to be a cisgender woman to be a witch. However, this isn't the majority and I would run a mile if any coven required you to subscribe this. Quakers aren't, after all, the only community struggling to be trans-inclusive.

With paganism, I have had the same sense that I've always had with Quakerism: this is who I am, who I'm meant to be and who I always was. The specifics might change, but at the moment at least, this practice feels right and I'm happy to call myself a witch.

# Love as a Transformative Experience

*“Whenever and wherever she appeared, in the hope of receiving her miraculous salutation I felt I had not an enemy in the world. Indeed I glowed with a flame of charity which moved me to forgive all who had ever injured me”* (Dante, La Vita Nuova XI)

In this passage, Dante is describing the lady Beatrice, who he has fallen in love with. But he isn't just describing her – he is not talking about how she acts, what she's like, or merely pining about how much he wants to be with her. In a way, this passage isn't about Beatrice at all. It's about everyone else in the world. Dante is describing how his love of Beatrice and the hope of getting her attention change the way he sees the world in general. Suddenly, he feels that he has no enemies and no sense of resentment for anyone at all. Beatrice isn't the only thing Dante is thinking about all the time, but when she is present Dante's love for her inspires a sudden and radical change in him.

*For Dante, being moved by love is (I think quite literally) being moved by the divine.*

I think what Dante is getting at here is the idea that loving someone or something isn't the same as just having desire or admiration. Instead it's something which deeply moulds our understanding of who we are and what kind of a world we live in. Beatrice's greeting isn't just something that Dante wants to have, and then after he gets it he can move on and go about his life in the same way as before. Rather, it's something that affects Dante's perception of what it is to care about things on the most fundamental level. For Dante, this is very much a spiritual experience. Beatrice's salutation is described as “miraculous”. It inspires him to be moved to charity and forgiveness. For Dante, being moved by love is (I think quite literally) being moved by the divine.

Dante's love for Beatrice is far from perfect – he's hardly had any really substantial interactions with her, and we might even say he is more infatuated

with her than he is actually in love. For example, we might think that if Dante loved Beatrice more, he would be inspired to be a good person who “glow[s] with a flame of charity” all the time, and not just whenever she happens to appear. Perhaps Dante's emotions seem too temporary to really count as a spiritual experience. In the section immediately after the one I've quoted, Dante goes home and he's a total wreck. He is “so overwhelmed with grief” that he just cries a lot and then falls asleep. We might have expected that divine love should inspire him to be strengthened and resilient, but instead it makes him weak and vulnerable.

However, I don't think that these things make Dante's experience any less profound or divine. Indeed, I think that this weakness and vulnerability can shed light on some important insights about how love can be understood as a spiritual experience. Dante is human after all, and his worldview has just been totally overthrown. He describes how after returning home;

*“I shut myself in my room where I could continue my lament without being heard. And there... crying ‘Love help your faithful one’, I fell asleep in the midst of my weeping, like a little child...”* (Dante, La Vita Nuova XII)

*For Dante, being moved by love is (I think quite literally) being moved by the divine.*

The force of his love for Beatrice has reduced Dante to a child; he is lost and overwhelmed and all he can do is give way to his emotional state. He cries to ‘Love’, (which is something like the ideal of love which Dante addresses as if it's a person), and declares himself faithful to it. This cry sounds very much like a prayer. The world he inhabits has suddenly become new to him – he does not have the kind of control and understanding of reality that he used to have. All Dante can do is give himself up to Love and place his faith in its power.

## *Sasha Lawson-Frost uses Dante and L M Montgomery to show the spiritual power of epiphany*

Dante's experience can be described as a kind of epiphany; it's a dramatic and sudden realisation of a new way of seeing the world. An interesting characteristic of his experience however is that he hasn't exactly learnt something new about the world. It isn't quite like Archimedes sitting in his bath and suddenly realising how the principle of buoyancy works. There is no natural or scientific belief that Dante has decidedly changed his opinion on. He hasn't discovered some new fact. Nonetheless it does also seem like Dante has discovered something.

### *It's a dramatic and sudden realisation of a new way of seeing the world.*

How, then, might we understand the sense in which Dante has discovered something new to him? Perhaps we want to say something like he's found a new way of seeing the world? To start to get to grips with this question we can look at another (quite different) example from literature:

*"The west was a glory of soft mingled hues, and the pond reflected them all in still softer shadings. The beauty of it all thrilled Anne's heart, and she gratefully opened the gates of her soul to it. 'Dear old world' she murmured, 'you are very lovely, and I am glad to be alive in you.'" (L M Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables, Chapter XXXVIII)*

Here, Anne Shirley has not fallen dramatically in love with another person, but is instead moved to a meditative state of gratitude by the presence of natural beauty. She is looking at a familiar landscape in her town of Avonlea, and she must have seen this same scene hundreds of times before. But still by "open[ing] the gates of her soul" she is able to see the pond and the scenery in a new light; one that is soft and beautiful and deeply emotive for her. The passage is describing Anne walking home after visiting the grave of her adoptive father.

### *It's a simple expression of gratitude and love for the world*

I think that Anne's "murmuring" to the world can be taken as a kind of prayer, much like Dante's cry to Love. It's a simple expression of gratitude and love for the world. The phrasing of the prayer draws attention to very simple things about being alive and part of the world. She addresses the world as 'you', as if she were talking to an old friend who she has grown up with. She does not just say she is glad to be alive, but she is glad to be alive "in you". She draws attention to the fact that she is in a relationship with the world – this world with its own beauty and loveliness and its own pain and suffering. Anne hasn't said anything new about the way the world is that we didn't already know. But what I think is striking about this prayer is that it brings to our attention these basic features of being alive that are usually just in the background of our experiences. Anne is bringing these simple things into the foreground, and seeing them as a source of joy and love. I think it is also a brave thing to declare that the world is lovely. Anne knows the world has a lot of pain and difficulty in it, but she is still open to the joy and love she finds in it.

# A Touch of the Unseen

The trouble is  
you see the shell  
and assume  
life is empty.

Bring my soul into focus.  
Colour between my lines.  
Only your perspective  
can change so much  
without changing anything.

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Live  
with souls like foxes  
scratching the paint  
from the doors of heaven:  
not to be let in,  
but for peace  
to be let out.

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Through stillness  
or the whispering  
of the everlasting tongues:  
your voice  
prefigured  
the engine roar.



*Poetry by Michelle Dumont*

Maybe love is not  
like a rose  
that blooms and dies  
It is more like  
a walk  
through a wild flower meadow  
With the right attention  
you will keep finding  
new kinds of love  
that live alongside  
the old kinds

But if you think you have seen  
all there is to see,  
you will miss  
the most beautiful secrets.  
Keep walking.  
New colours and shapes  
that wrap around each other  
and change with the seasons

# Sketches of a Godless Quakerism

*“Every joy in relation and nowhere grasping:  
world in abundance and earth enough”*  
(Rilke, Lifting My Eyes)

Every time I know I will be away from my partner for a while I always ensure that my last words to her are ‘I love you’. This may sound corny but more deeply it reflects discernments on love, life and death which recent experiences have forced me to struggle with. This is not to say I’m closer to the joy of life nor the tragic of death than anyone else but that the last few years have show me both the vulnerability and brilliance of life as we live it.

Thoughts on death could not help forcing their way into my mind. A dear friend of unmeasurable compassion and commitment, died last year and the resulting pain will always be too raw to put into words. My Mum went through and thankful survived the horrors of cancer and chemo which caused her strong body to become ever weaker and fragile before the joy of recovery began. And certainly of least importance, my own emerging epilepsy further fuelled ruminations on death. The unpredictable nature of the seizures means that every time I stand on a train platform, ascend stairs or simply cross a road. I always have a fear in the back of my mind that my life could be no more as my seizing body could be fatally hit by a car, a train or repeatedly smashed on hardened surfaces of the city of the millions who I adore to live among.

**It is this joy of living in relation with others that allowed me to face these reflections on death with those of the brilliance of life**

It is this joy of living in relation with others that allowed me to face these reflections on death with those of the brilliance of life. My Mum’s recovery from cancer brought a happiness that is impossible to describe. At the same time I fell madly and totally in love with someone and for some irrational reason she decided to love me with equal strength back.

These joyful events allowed me to see in the value of life in the face of death. The great fragility of life embodied in our vulnerability to death bring, for me at least, a greater valuing of the brilliant beauty of life. It is this experience of deep connection with another person, be it for seconds or for life, which fuels the will to live on in the face of our precariousness to death that lies at the heart of the godless Quakerism I’ll try to sketch out here.

Traditional concepts of faith, for me, always seem to devalue the relations of life. They always states there is something more important, more significant, that lies beyond and above our lives and the very human relationships that define them. They see the only purpose of life is to follow the will of a supernatural force with the reward that if you do a heaven or nirvana awaits where you leave the crap that is your life behind. The joy and love gained from living in solidarity with others is just not good enough and death is not a tragedy but a release as long as you have followed orders from on high. Even if we do try to put human relations first we will be crushed by the power beyond us, as this is the only force that can ultimately define our lives. Human life is always of secondary value to the great plan of an unseen force taking us toward an undefined future utopia that will happen if only we follow this power above. Only a form of hell awaits those that live for the sake of human life alone.

**Traditional concepts of faith, for me, always seem to devalue the relations of life.**

What for me seems to this sustain this devaluing of human life is the absolute belief that there is some superior force above of far greater value than human relationships. I wouldn’t claim to know the order of all existence including if there is or isn’t a divine but it is from that fundamental uncertainty that the Quakerism I follow arises.

If we can accept this cosmic uncertainty of never know if there is or is not an ultimate transcendental



## ***Laurence Hall*** writes how the vulnerability and brilliance of life lies at the heart of a Godless Quakerism in which humans are enough

order to the universe then our focus is draw to toward the true value of human relations and the central task of building solidarity with the beings around us. In essence, if we stop staring up to an abstract heaven above and instead look into the eyes of our fellow sentient beings then we will see that all the potentiality of meaning, beauty and creativity needed to create a life and a world in which we can all flourish as equals, is already there between us. And well we humans are finite beings with all the limitations of that, it is within those same limitations that we find the empathic drive behind the solidarity needed for all of us to truly shine together. No supernatural force is needed for this very human task.

For me the practices and values of Quakerism provides the best framework to realise the egalitarian solidarity needed to release the potentiality alight within all humans. All that Quakerism is flows from a foundation of radical equality which no other community has. From our ways of worship and decision making within the community to the values that we live by beyond the meeting house walls are based on the equal value of human life. In meeting for worship we enact this ideal of egalitarian freedom as people come together as equals without the hierarchy of a pre-prepared order of things. Instead you are give your freedom to express but so are others who must be listen to, response to and valued as equals. And Discernment and Witness follow the same ethic as the ongoing process of living and creating that the radical egalitarian solidarity at the heart of Quakerism within our meetings and the world beyond.

### **Ministry, which for me, is not a calling by the supernatural but a declaration of radical equality**

This egalitarian logic extents to Ministry, which for me, is not a calling by the supernatural but a declaration of radical equality that disrupts the inequality of the current Quaker order. It declares that Quaker meetings only represent an unfulfilled equality which

must be called out by a ministry fuelled by a deep solidarity with the absent voices of whose that hierarchies within and beyond meetings have silenced. Ministry does not speak for the silenced but break the settled silence by a disruptive declaration of real equality. When one is moved to make that declaration then it becomes the godless ministry of equality.

### **It is a Quakerism in which we humans are enough.**

I don't claim that this the only Quaker path. These are the hesitant and incomplete stretches of the godless ethic of radical equality which I strive for as a Quaker. In the face of our vulnerability to death finds that doing our best to ensure the flourish of all life is all we need to do as Friends. It is a Quakerism in which the value of every life and the relations that define them lies at its root. It is a Quakerism in which the supernatural is no longer needed nor wanted. It is a Quakerism in which we humans are enough.



# Dark Skies

## Dark Skies

Separation across the dark skies,  
cat's fur black, streaked with pain  
like thin strips of needle red from  
a sun already forgotten, of a hope  
finally turned to charred embers

I wait under the deadened oak  
trees which lead up the valley into  
the hills the wind smacks my face

I can't breathe, and in the ache I  
struggle to understand myself as I  
stare out at great expanse

Separation; across these dark  
skies, I am the one they left behind  
I was left unfinished. I was left un-  
heard.

Silent I am still lost like the cen-  
tre of an infinite circle, In being  
left unfinished, I guide the others  
homewards, and I wait.

Separation; across the dark skies- a  
betrayal- you lie- I defend you turn  
on me, I defend you still, across the  
dark skies.

## Yellow Rose (inspired by Stop Your Tears Aldous Harding)

The yellow rose is a stranger an  
invitation only the devil knows we  
are not so far away from those that

prey and those that bleed their  
innocence upon the ground

And yet I spoke to you in riddles  
and you replied in books I have

arrived at the border and I long for  
you I have arrived at the border  
and I long for you

*Poetry by Lynda Berry*

**Unspoken**

A poem can not write itself,  
words can not speak themselves,  
all that is unspoken, all that can not  
be read, unless you reach within  
with truth-telling hands.

Wine can not drink itself, incom-  
plete thoughts, is this all there is?  
Space we just can not bridge.

The body has a language, I am sure  
you know it well, and it is no small  
matter, no small matter.

I do not want to turn you away,  
you offer so patiently, politely, and  
well... but forever holding the peace  
can not sooth the child inside, is  
there another way?

Words can not speak themselves,  
and wine doesn't always make it  
easier, though it's tempting to be-  
lieve, to give in, but if we cared and  
are moved, is this what you want?

Silence is the room, words unsaid,  
wine unopened, poems unwritten

**Poem (December 2012)**

Waiting, not thinking,  
tired and waiting,  
I observe palm trees in the cold,  
and in that moment,  
staring at the palm tree,  
the scene opens before me, glow-  
ing and radiant,  
fresh and altogether new,  
life is here too,  
as it is at home,  
all is another expression of the di-  
vine thought,  
before me, like my first books  
which taught me how to read,  
Here I am, at the beginning,  
the bud in the instances of blos-  
soming,  
peeking out from the darkness,  
embracing cold warmth of winter  
sunshine,  
here is life, too,  
I am a part of it,  
a part of the palm tree,  
no separation.

(First poem written in Chongqing,  
China).

## Writers...

The editors would like to thank all those who have contributed to this edition of *The Young Quaker*.

It would be impossible to produce the magazine without the ideas, articles and illustrations that you send in.

We're always looking for new material. If you've got an idea for an article, photo, drawing or poem you'd like to see in *The Young Quaker*, get in touch with us. The next issue, due out in time for the next YFGM in May, will have a submission deadline of 1st April 2019.

Read TYQ online at:  
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## What is...

**The Young Quaker** is a magazine for young Friends everywhere, produced in print and online. Published by Young Friends General Meeting, TYQ comes out three times a year, to coincide with YFGM weekends, meaning that you can expect a new issue in February, May, and October, full of news, comment, and more.

**Young Friends General Meeting** is a community for young adult Quakers aged 18-30ish, in Britain. Our main events are the three General Meetings which take place at Quaker meeting houses around the country in February, May, and October each year.

If you'd like to get involved in YFGM, come along to a YFGM event, or to find out more visit [www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk](http://www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk) or email [yfgm@quaker.org.uk](mailto:yfgm@quaker.org.uk). You can also find the YFGM group on Facebook.

**Quakers**, or the Religious Society of Friends, are a religious group with Christian origins. Quaker worship is mostly silent, with people speaking when called to do so by the 'Inner Light', sometimes called 'that of God within everyone'.

Central to Quakerism are the Testimonies of Peace, Equality, Truth, Simplicity and Sustainability. A commitment to these principles has put Quakers at the forefront of political and social issues; campaigning for the abolition of slavery and more recently for the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

# YFGM Catch Up (October 2018)

By Sam Cooper & Rici Marshall Cross, Co-clerks

We gathered in York at Friargate Meeting House. As usual, the shared Meeting for Worship with local friends on Sunday morning was a highlight, and in Ministry we celebrated the gifts that Friends of all ages bring to the Society. We made an effort this weekend to shine a light on what it meant for our meeting to be a spiritual community, with spirituality sessions starting only hours after arrivals. We shared reflections with each other on advices and queries, and we were encouraged to think about how we could incorporate some of what we most value about YFGM into our daily lives: we wrote reminders to ourselves about them on postcards, and we look forward to seeing them in the post in a few weeks. As two new clerks, we looked forward with trepidation to our first experience of meeting for worship for business from the clerk's table. Though some of the business was at first glance procedural and mundane, out of it we found ways of strengthening our witness of community with each another. In approving our new safeguarding policy, we were brought to ask how we hoped to treat each other in our community; in beginning the process of reviewing our Mental Wellbeing concern, we spoke of how we hoped to care for one another; in approving our budget, we set aside money for training, with a view to helping our role-holders care for our community; and in nominations returns, ministry spoke of the need for the community to take responsibility for supporting and upholding those who take on responsibilities on our behalf. We also undertook to write a memorial minute for our Friend Becky Garnault, and in Saturday night's epilogue we remembered her to one another, sharing stories of her heart. We miss her presence in our community, and she lives on in the grace given to us through her life, embodied in the stories we tell about her and the effect of the strength and brightness of her character on those who knew her. Following our minute in May's YFGM, we invited the clerks of Central Nominations Committee to talk to us about how we could be more involved and included in the coming revision to the book of discipline. We've had special interest groups on the development of a new program to nurture our sustainability witness, planning our upcoming special interest gathering, our website, singing, and capoeira. And in between all this, we've lived our community in conversation and friendship, eating, cleaning, and cooking together exploring the city, playing many silly games, and worshipping together. We leave each hoping to bring something back from YFGM into our daily lives.