

Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

Issue 22

December 2008

Children



Quakers in South Asia – working with peace builders

This children's work edition of "Journeys in the Spirit" comes out monthly. It offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with children aged 4 –12 years in a Quaker setting. It is offered with the intention of providing an opportunity for exploring, creating and learning in an atmosphere of worship in partnership on our shared journey in the spirit.

Included are sections on: **getting ready**, for those co-ordinating the programme; **gather**, meeting, centering, focusing: **engage**, beginning to think about the theme; **respond**, activities linked to the theme; **reflect**, ending appropriately; and **review**, evaluating what has happened. To offer a balanced session you should aim to do something from each section. Some of the activities are included on additional sheets. Timings or ages are not stated, as this will depend on the group and how the guidance and activities are used.

Underpinning each issue is the idea that there are four directions to our spiritual journey. **Inwards** to ourselves; **outwards** to others; **upwards** towards God, the deeper mystery; **downwards** to the world we live in.



The fourteenth in the series exploring Quakers: a people of God: being and doing

Getting ready

Quaker Testimonies are lived out expressions of what Quakers see as eternal truths, as gifts of the Spirit. In responding to those gifts and based on the foundation of Love and Truth, (QF&P 1.02.1 the inner call to be a peacemaker and peacebuilder is an important part of the Quaker contribution to life. Quakers are one of "Peace Churches" within the Christian Church. People of other faith traditions, notably the Buddhists and Hindus, also recognise the need for *ahimsa* -harmlessness. Quakers are joined with others across the world in affirming the way of nonviolence.

अहिंसा

Ahimsa

Children are spontaneous in many ways: joyfulness and friendship, frustration and anger and, sometimes, cruelty to others that might be because of difficult to understand and probably unfulfilled needs. How can we help them to think about their own feelings and behaviour in relation to nonviolence when they may be trying to establish their own identity? If we can encourage them to cooperate with other children and adults, some of whom will perhaps seem very different (different race, language, beliefs) and help them to overcome their fear and speak up when they feel something is wrong these can be the foundations of a peacemaker. The examples below from Quaker work in South Asia may help them to hear about a world probably beyond their normal experience and give opportunities to empathise with the lives of others.

Underpinning references

How can we prepare to be a people of peace? How do we become warriors who use methods of peace instead of the ways of violence? The ways are many and the challenge is moment-by-moment. Those of us working with children know this well!

Panoramic insights can be found in **Quaker Faith & Practice 24.10**. Each short paragraph in this statement from Friends in New Zealand could be a point of inward focus and sharing.

Gather

One way of “stilling” ourselves: In South Asia people being trained for, and practising, peace work sit cross legged and straight backed - each *day* sharing a time of prayer/meditation/reflection. So, sit cross legged on the floor in a circle or facing each other. First, feel connected by passing a gentle squeeze of the hands around the group. For two people, hold hands and pass a squeeze from hand to hand and ‘through one person’s body’ to that person’s other hand. Now be still.

In their spiritual training for peace some people using nonviolence in India sing or chant a prayer. Sing or chant or just say out loud - “Om shanti, shanti, shanti, om” on one note. Can you feel the sound in your body – like a vibration? This can be even more emphasised if you sing these words or notes by closing your eyes and blocking your ears. (“Om” – as a form of praise to God – “Shanti” is a Sanskrit word meaning “Inner Peace” or “Tranquillity”)

Another way is, like Quakers, to greet each other after a little time of stillness. In some parts of India people greet you by saying “Namaste” (pronounced “Namasstay”) – meaning “I salute that of God in you from the place of God in me”. In India some people who feel close to you call you “Bhen” (sister) or “Bhai” (brother) - you may want to try this with one another: “Namaste Jill Bhen” or “Namaste John Bhai.” See *Sheet 22.A for a globe to talk about where India is.* See *Sheet 22.B for pictures related to Om and Namaste to use during Gather.*

Engage Rajagopal and Janadesh

Being a peacebuilder by learning from, and helping, others.

In 2001 a man came from India to Britain. His name is Rajagopal. He invited Quakers in Britain to join him in his nonviolence work. He works alongside some of the poorest people in India and he had met Quakers before.

When he was young he had heard stories about a man called M.K.Gandhi. He loved what this famous peace worker did and said. Rajagopal went to live amongst poor people in a place where many poor people were threatened by other poor people called dacoits (local thugs) who had guns. Many had been hurt or even killed. The place was called Chambal Valley.

In 1971, despite being threatened, beaten up and told to leave by the dacoits, he stayed. He worked very hard to get more than 600 dacoits who laid down their guns – see side bar for more detail.

He has helped thousands of people learn to be nonviolent when they are stopping other, often rich and powerful people, taking or stealing their land, water and forests. 35 years later and after thousands of miles of walking to villages to support the needs of the poorest people, he led a 200+ mile march called Janadesh (“Peoples Verdict”) to peacefully fight for poor people’s right to have what they need to live. *Sheet 22.C for a version of the Rajagopal and Janadesh story suitable for Under 7’s.*

A reference & other information

Expressed in a different way from Quaker Faith & Practice we can look for guidance to the Jewish part of the Christian Bible written about 2700 years ago - **Micah 6, v 8**

“What does the Lord require of us all but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God?”



The dacoits who gave up their guns and stopped hurting people went to prison. Afterwards they were given some land to grow food and look after their families. One man told the story of how he had been hurt by the police. He was terribly angry and decided he would get a gun to look after his family but he hurt lots of other people. When he came out of prison he began a more settled life. In 2002 Stuart Morton, Quaker worker, met him; this former local terrorist was now supporting Ekta Parishad’s nonviolent struggle to assist poor people.



Resources and ideas

Ekta Parishad is a group of roughly 11,000 community based organizations with thousands of individual members. It works for the land and livelihood rights of India's most marginalized communities (tribals, Dalits, nomadic communities, agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, etc.)

Look at film or part of a film of Ekta Parishad march – (DVD /CD available for which for purchase via Stuart Morton in QPSW, Friends House, 020 7663 1072. Price is £10 inc. p&p.

Search for 'Janadesh youtube' on the internet

Working together: Sometimes you can be in difficulty or danger with a group of people you are part of. An example might be that you are lost in a wood. You need to call for help. Each of you separately may call "Help!" or all could shout "Help!" at the same time with a better chance of being heard. So when we are in trouble, we need to join together so that our voices are heard.



Engage continued:

Rajagopal is one of the leaders of something called Ekta Parishad. This means Unity Forum. That might be hard to understand but, look at the picture of the Ekta Parishad symbol - see *Sheet 22.D*. It is like a big circle of women, children and men, holding hands and helping each other. Unity means 'joining together'. Give each person a copy of the symbol.

Most of the people in Ekta Parishad are very poor – they live and work in the country in India. Often these people have their land taken from them and nobody protects them – not even the government. With the help of people like Rajagopal these people were going to do something about this. After 3 years work 25,000 people were ready for the Janadesh march. Janadesh means – People's Verdict. See *Sheet 22.E* for a picture and some simple questions to help conversation.

The 25,000 people on Janadesh walked 200 miles to Delhi capital city of India. Women carried their children all the way; everybody slept by the roadside where food kitchens and water tanks were set up. Many people had saved a handful of grain – like rice – every day for a year. This meant that, while mums or dads were on Janadesh, their families would have enough to eat.

The people marching all that way were very peaceful and strong. The Government listened and agreed that ways would be found for land to be given out more fairly. This would help people to grow their food and look after their families. So far this promise has not been kept. They will bring a hundred thousand marchers next time if the promises are not kept.

Respond

Rajagopal. As Quakers we are invited to "Be patterns, be examples" for other people – that can be hard. See *Quaker Faith and Practice* 19.32. After telling the story of Rajagopal ask questions like: I wonder which part of this story about Rajagopal you like the most? I wonder which part of the story you think is most important? I wonder if there is anything about Rajagopal that you would like to be?

Quakers asked Stuart Morton to respond to Rajagopal's invitation to walk with him in the villages of India. Have you ever been invited to take part in something that you thought might be scary or difficult? What did you do? What happened?

Janadesh. Make pictures of the march to tell the story to other people. How many Janadesh marchers can you make to tell the story? Can you make a march to stretch around the wall? Can somebody copy the Ekta Parishad symbol – see *Sheet 22.D*? See *Sheet 22.F* for ideas about making Janadesh figures.

Children can ask people in the rest of Quaker meeting if they have been in marches - what was it for, what happened, how did it help? Ask other questions like: what did you do? How did you feel? Were there any children?

Invite everybody in Meeting to bring a handful of rice to Meeting for two weeks. Use it as part of a shared meal hosted by the children on a Janadesh theme. Make invitations using copies of the Janadesh card on *Sheet 22.D*.

Send email messages of support to: janadesh2007@gmail.com or ektaparishad@gmail.com or letters to: 2/3 A Basement, Jungpura A Block, New Delhi, Delhi 110014, India.

Resources: Cloth, fabric pens, acrylic paints, brushes, pencils, scissors, collage materials, glue and brushes, clay and clay tools.

Reflect

The stories/events we have heard have been about people who live in other countries – a long way away. I wonder, if there is one thing you want to remember from today what might that be? Or, I wonder, how are we connected to Rajagopal and the people on Janadesh?

Children's meeting could write a question - a query - to be used in the adult meeting for worship to help the adults focus on peace and nonviolence? Maybe it could start with the words – 'today we have heard about Ekta Parishad and Janadesh – how.....?'

Review

The review can happen at the time or later – it maybe by yourself or with others. Some useful questions for the use of volunteers to look back over and learn from the session include:

- Have children been able to participate in their own way?
- What went well and why?
- Has each child been able to reflect, even a little, on something about her or his thoughts and feelings about people in India?
- What is there for you to learn from this session? What might you do differently another time?

Topical activity

A Celebration of Light. A celebration that reflects a wish to enjoy the "Light" in all of us rather than emphasise the material aspect of Christmas. Put lighted candles in jam jars around a space in front of your Meeting House - one Meeting created a Peace garden.

Decorate the front of the Meeting House with greenery. Invite all ages, but particularly children, in your town, village or neighbourhood to a simple event – each person can add to the decoration by writing or drawing a hope or a wish for someone else on a leaf shaped piece of paper. Afterwards there could be stories and maybe a lantern procession.

Links to other organisations and resources

Search online for 'Janadesh' for lots more pictures and information.

www.janadesh.net - for more information about Janadesh.

www.quaker.org.uk/cyp - click on Ideas Store.

www.quaker.org.uk/cyp - the Quaker Life Resources Room can be found via this link - phone and email for resources on the contact details below.

This issue was written by Stuart Morton of Quaker Peace and Social Witness and edited by Chris Nickolay. The Topical Activity was provided by Wellington Local Meeting and edited by Chris Nickolay.

The next children's issue of *Journeys in the Spirit*, issue 23, looks at nonviolence - available January 5th 2009. This is followed by a second issue on Quaker work in South Asia, issue 24, – available February 2nd 2009. The final issue of this series, number 25, will be on Belonging and Joining – available March 2nd 2009.

Other thoughts and reflections

Our lives, and the action we take, speak to others. Supporting people who are forgotten because they do not have money, or have not been to a good school, whether they are in our own town, village or far away in other countries is part of our faith.

When we have agreed or promised to do something that we do not want to do, we must still do our best to do it. Sometimes, we can be surprised and receive an unexpected gift of Hope by sticking to our word.

A way for all ages to connect with Janadesh and each other:

See the last, the rice, activity in the Respond section.

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