

The Soul-voyagers Network brings the Hiroshima Peace Flame to Charney Manor to promote World Peace... A Worthwhile Endeavour?

Jen's reflections on the 2015 Retreat

Some may regard synchronicity and symbolism as so much mumbo-jumbo. Not me! I am ardently convinced of the truth and power of both and my experience of organising our recent Retreat at Charney Manor, and participating in it, adds to my certainty, despite.....

Well, despite the fact that it was dedicated to promoting World Peace – and we cannot be unaware of how spectacularly we seem to have ‘failed’ if that was our goal. As I write, the vote supporting bombing in Syria was taken in the Commons yesterday evening.

Yet even despite that, on balance I hold onto optimism. I also believe in the 100th Monkey Syndrome identified by Rupert Sheldrake, and know that, unless every one of the 100 Monkeys plays its part – essential in building towards the necessary Tipping Point – a shift of consciousness will not happen. Our precious Network of Grace is one of these Monkeys doing its valuable bit! I do trust that the tide is in the process of turning. No-one ever promised that it would be easy.

I know that synchronicity was involved because I know that I did not engage in conscious and rational planning of all aspects of the Retreat – that would have been quite beyond my powers. What happened was that the universe co-operated and opportunities therefore presented themselves over a matter of months – yet it did mysteriously come together in the multidimensional ways which all those who were there experienced, and from which we all benefited.

Synchronicity

From any common-sense point of view, there is no way the Retreat should have happened, let alone been the glowing success that it was.

I organised this year's retreat virtually single-handedly. The reasons for this I shared, for the sake of transparency, at the AGM which was part of

the Retreat, but I do not wish to articulate them further here. I prefer now to move on, and there are many encouraging signs that this is happening. But conditions a year ago were not propitious – we had a very small cushion of funds and no possibility of adding to it – so how would it be possible to attract presenters, either members or guest presenters, of sufficient calibre to constitute a worthwhile Retreat? We were also already committed to our wonderful, but rather pricey venue, and under difficult conditions. We were committed to paying for 20 participants even if we didn't attract that number, and we could not exceed 30 because of the size of the accommodation. Quite a tightrope to walk!

But this is where synchronicity intervened and enabled the planning of the programme – it evolved in a way that I can only regard as miraculous. The universe, it seems, conspired to help me, by bringing to my attention, in succession, a series of potential presenters not only superbly gifted in the teachings they offered, but so little motivated by financial greed that they were prepared to accept the very modest – indeed pitiful – fees I was able to offer them! Each one was a blessing.

The upshot was that by July I was able to send out an invitation to all members of the Network, describing with excitement how the programme had evolved – those who responded may well not want to read through it all again, so please just skip the bit in italics if that is the case, but I would like to include it here for the benefit of newcomers to our website so that they can be aware of how things happened.

Paul and Chika Robertson were the first presenters to agree to come, both very eminent violinists with a lifelong interest in the connections between music and mental/spiritual health. Paul was to introduce 'Towards Silence', a composition written for him by Sir John Tavener, and inspired by Near Death Experiences which they both shared. Gilly Angell, our meditation and yoga teacher, also agreed to contribute to our capacity to move through the progressive stages of expanded consciousness which the music expresses, with some meditation guidance, so hearing the music was to be a participatory and experiential event, exercising our 'consciousness muscles; and helping us to be fully 'awake'.

Pam Douglas-Smith, ordained minister at the Unity Spiritual Enrichment Centre in Port Townsend, Washington, had agreed to present on Grail/Magdalene and Sacred Partnership Mysteries on Saturday morning. Since balance between the Sacred Masculine and the Divine Feminine is central to such Mysteries, Pam has agreed that a suggestion I made earlier - to dedicate the Saturday evening programme to Healing in the Middle East - in whatever form we can promote it - would be highly appropriate, and would follow on logically. To do what we can to heal rifts both between and within the dominant religions of the area, would seem to be a very worthwhile endeavour.

Martin Redfern, ex-BBC sound engineer, has already said that he can bring a film of the Westminster Synagogue concert, presented for precisely that purpose last year. Most movingly, two Iranian women read a Rumi poem in Farsi, then an English translation, and the Medici Quartet played 'Scatter Roses over my Tears' - a very beautiful piece, whose title comes from the poem. It was a parting gift from John Tavener to Paul Robertson, and it would be a remarkable privilege to hear it at our Retreat.

And I have already arranged another magical piece which I know people will enjoy. By wonderful synchronicity (so it must be 'meant'!) I heard a performance of 'Chant' for solo guitar, again by John Tavener, played by Samantha Muir as part of the Sherborne Abbey Festival. She has agreed to come and play this for us - as well as the performance, she gives an illuminating illustrated talk so that we can appreciate this little-known piece better.

As the pieces of the programme gradually fell into place, it came to me that it would be a good idea to promote, not just tolerance, but the possibility of rich cross-fertilisation and exchange. If this could happen in early mediaeval Spain and Provence, as we discovered on our Cathar/Magdalene trip last year, surely it could happen again? I hoped we would be able to do what we could to promote it.

Synchronicity continued, it seemed to me, in support of this idea, because the Chalice Well Trust presented a quite wonderful programme called 'Exploring the Sacred Arts of Islam' in June. . There was much input from 'The Prince's School of Traditional Arts' - one of Prince Charles's very constructive initiatives. There was a free art exhibition and many workshops, including accessible introductions to Sacred Geometry - all absorbing.

What I found especially enthralling, however, was a workshop and concert on Sacred Geometry and Music by Sama Mara of www.musicalforms.com It struck me that a presentation by him would perfectly complement the rest of our programme, so I spoke to him after the concert to ask if he would consider this and he has now agreed to join us. The visual programme he presents – with whizzy computer technology – is his answer to the question

– ‘What would music look like if you could see it? – and very beautiful it is. The musicians agreed very enthusiastically to participate with him – so you are in for a beautiful treat if you come!

So for the ‘Healing in the Middle East’ ceremony, we have co-operating representatives from Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions, happily working together and taking sustenance and inspiration from each other’s cultural/spiritual traditions.

Not only that, we are planning to extend our brief even further – as if ‘Healing in the Middle East’ was not ambitious enough!

When I attended Sama Mara’s event in Glastonbury I learned for the first time of the Peace Flame, whose shrine was in the same room. I learned that it was first lit from the atomic fires of Hiroshima and has been kept burning ever since as a symbol of remembrance, forgiveness and transformation.

After the bombing, a man named Tatsuo Yamamoto collected some of the embers from the devastation. His grandmother then kept the fire burning on her Buddhist altar, before which she prayed every day, morning and night. It was a flame of love for her family who had died in the nuclear holocaust. Thirteen years later, a newspaper reporter wrote an article about the long-burning flame and later, in 1968, a ‘Peace Flame Monument’ was inaugurated where the flame has been carefully tended ever since. Countless other flames have been lit from it so that the Peace Flame now burns all over the world; it has been burning in Glastonbury since 2004.

In the Peace Dome in Glastonbury, work is done with sacred geometry, sound and silence to create a universal sacred space for people to sit with the flame, to meditate and to pray. The central Merkabah is a ‘Star Tetrahedron’ or three-dimensional Star of David which symbolises the balance of heaven and earth and is also said to be the divine light vehicle through which we can connect with the higher realms of consciousness.

When I told Paul Robertson about this, because his wife, Chika, is Japanese, he was immediately keen that I arrange for a piece of this flame to be part of our Retreat at Charney Manor, and I am in the process of arranging this. We therefore hope that the music on the Sunday morning of our Retreat, transmuted through Sama Mara’s Islamic lens, will be representative of as many cultural/spiritual traditions as are represented by those attending, and that healing and harmonious vibrations can spread out to reach and touch as many corners of the world as possible.

I feel that the majority of those who were there will have been profoundly touched, as I was, by the impact of the Retreat – many, indeed, have contacted me to say that they were – and I suspect that in the future, many will look back with a sense of gratitude and privilege to be able to say – ‘I

was there!' We were actually co-creating a new and profound way of processing damage that urgently needed to be healed. 'Remembrance, forgiveness and transformation' were the keywords.

Symbolism

Now to focus on the Peace Flame itself. When I started to plan the Retreat I did not know of the existence of the Hiroshima Peace Flame in Glastonbury – yet it became an important holding symbol, giving a meaningful context and focus to the work of the Retreat. Both the story of it (see above) and its significance – 'remembrance, forgiveness and transformation' – made a major appeal to the imagination. This is what symbols do – suggest multiple meanings beyond the literal, and reaching high into spiritual realms beyond the 'ordinary'. As David Fontana says, they 'move and inspire us at a deep level of intuitive wisdom, speaking to us in a universal language which the great pioneers of psychology such as Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud have helped us to interpret'.

If a piece of the Hiroshima Peace Flame, embodying all its symbolic significance, were to be present at our Retreat at Charney Manor, I felt that several conditions of its symbolism had to be satisfied. It had to be safely conveyed from Glastonbury to Charney as a living flame; it had to be kept continuously alight for three whole days and nights without going out; and it had to be returned to the Peace Dome in Glastonbury to be reunited with its source, so that the healing energies of the retreat could be permanently incorporated in those kept alight there.

Tim, the guardian of the flame in Glastonbury, early on expressed doubts about the re-connecting of the flames, saying that few people actually did this, though parts of the flame frequently contributed to other events. I regretfully concluded that it would be one thing too many for me to organise.

As soon as I began to research how bringing it to our Retreat could be accomplished, I realised that it was easier said than done! All those I consulted – experts in the maintenance and transporting of flames and candles! – were encouraging, but keen to stress and enumerate the many pitfalls. These ranged from Health and Safety regulations to practical logistics.

A friend, Edi Hammelberg, had been developing a craft business around candles and Christmas decorations and I happened to come across her at a country fair I dropped in on – so, of course, I took the opportunity to ask if she had any advice about the safe transporting of live flames. Intrigued, she asked more and more and, although not actually a member of Soul-voyagers, she became so inspired by the idea of the Retreat and its intentions that she wanted to make a contribution.

And what a contribution it was! She busied herself in finding practical solutions to all the problems and before long she arrived at my door with the splendid lantern which came with me to Charney – a huge pillar candle left over from my daughter's wedding was lodged inside a glass container, and aesthetically surrounded by greenery and rose petals (because 'Scatter Roses over my Tears' was the title of one of the Tavener pieces we were to hear). I was thrilled to receive such a perfect contribution, and even more so when she generously announced she wanted it to be a gift, not something that we would have to pay for.

However, everyone seemed to agree that there was a great danger the flame might blow out somewhere along the journey so that back-up flames should be organised to re-light it with integrity. Tim recommended using burning charcoal for this purpose – we bought charcoal and contrived a container for it.

Others recommended having groups of votive candles alight – four at a time – during the journey – so that there would hopefully always be one candle alight for any rekindling that was necessary. A bag of 100 votive candles was purchased.....

Our fears had persuaded us to adopt this belt and braces approach, so we have a photograph of Pam, setting out in the passenger-seat of my car, with the True Flame wedged safely between her knees, but on her lap the back-up 'insurance' paraphernalia. All started calmly and innocently enough but keeping the votive candles alight became quite a performance and before long, Pam's lap was piled unmanageably high, with heat and charcoal fumes gradually filled the car.....

There was a dramatic culmination to this discomfort – charcoals tumbled into an escaping stream of wax – conflagration! – and, just as we were joining the busy M4, black and billowing eye-stinging smoke started to fill the car! This hugely panicked the occupants of all the other cars jostling to get onto the motorway alongside us. I had opened the windows to let the black smoke escape so on all sides we could hear shouting voices – 'You're on fire! Pull over! Get out of the car! Call the Fire Brigade!'

Pam sank back exhausted amongst the debris, but I drove calmly onto the motorway, supported by seeing, out of the corner of my eye, that the central flame, safe in its glass container, glowed on strongly and actually was showing no sign whatever of going out! And so it continued throughout the weekend.....

Despite all the warnings – despite the fact that I had been assured that, as it burned down, the pillar candle was likely to produce a pool of wax in which the wick would drown and be extinguished; despite the fact that Sherborne Abbey very kindly gave me two large emergency candles as back-up to the one I had, convinced that it was unlikely to last the course;

despite wind and rain gusting around us as we transferred the candle from car to barn – the Peace Flame was steady and stalwart throughout! We of little faith just hadn't trusted enough – may that be a lesson to us!

Still nervous, I crept down in the dead middle of the night at Charney – in the extreme early hours of Friday, Saturday and Sunday – to check that it hadn't gone out. I gradually felt more and more abashed that I had doubted it! The glow lit up the whole large Barn from end to end.

Although excluded from the Solar because of strict safety regulations – insurance said NO FLAME OF ANY SORT in that precious room EVER! – the Hiroshima Peace Flame did witness both our opening ceremony and our closing ceremony. How it must have rejoiced its heart to see beautiful Chika, gorgeous in full Japanese regalia, striding between us playing 'Sakura', while we all sat round drinking Cherry Blossom Tea. Historical and Ancestral Healing indeed.

Quite apart from the knotty anxieties about maintaining and conveying the flame, other glitches happened in the run-up to the Retreat that threatened to disrupt the entire programme. Carol revealed to me on the eve of the Retreat that Mercury had been retrograde for three weeks before, so it was hardly surprising! He had certainly been busy - but, mercifully, he was just then on the point of turning. Vastly relieved, I gave Carol a big hug, but she assured me she could take no personal credit for this intelligence!

About three weeks before the event itself then, a day had been set aside for me to introduce the musicians to each other, to work out final details of the programme, and to rehearse. I learned with alarm that this crucial day had to be postponed because Paul was seriously unwell and undergoing scans and hospital treatment. He had been having severe nosebleeds – very challenging for someone on blood-thinning medication. Our rehearsal day was postponed for a week.

Before that week was even up, we heard, with even more alarm that poor Chika had had an allergic reaction to a bee sting – her hand and arm were greatly swollen and painful – she couldn't play! And still no possibility of meeting/rehearsing etc.....

It wasn't until the evening of Wed 7th October – with the retreat starting on the 9th – that we learned that Paul and Chika were both well enough to travel and would be there! So anyone who has organised an event will appreciate how difficult it was to hold one's nerve and trust that 'all would be well'.

Thus the 'essential' planning and rehearsal for the final morning of the Retreat had no opportunity to happen; it is a tribute to the remarkable goodwill, flexibility, skill and co-operation of our generous guests that it was able to happen at all – and it was perfect, despite a little coming and going!

While officiating for our closing ceremony, Pam had invited us all to take the light and warmth of the flame away with us in our hearts to spread its influence out into the world that way, which would have been perfectly good and sufficient – except, it seems, that the flame had other ideas.

Since it was still 'burning bright' when I was ready to go home, I didn't have the heart to snuff it out, so I propped it up in the car to accompany me on the way for a bit. To my delighted amazement, it continued unabated all the way home to Dorset.

So I set it up in my therapy room for the night to spread its healing vibes there – and it was still going strong in the morning.

Only then did it dawn on me – it really wants to go back to Glastonbury! The energies of our wonderful Retreat could then be permanently integrated with the on-going healing energy that continues to be generated there. So back in the car it went – no back-up 'insurance' needed – and the flame was returned to the Peace Dome. Tim was there giving a healing so I crept in and he witnessed me lighting eight votive candles directly from our flame and placing them under the Tetrahedron in the Sacred Space. Integration and continuity was assured before I finally felt ready to snuff it out.

I had not imagined that it would really be possible, but that is what happened and it felt very good and complete.

The 'symbol' had taken on a life of its own.....

So – fanciful to believe in synchronicity and powerful symbols through which alchemical healing may be promoted? – I don't think so!

Whether you were present at the Retreat or not, please do share your thoughts and feelings about this.....