

Report World Interfaith Harmony Week at Evera Trentham Australia

Part One: 1 and 7 February

On the first of February I attended the opening ceremony of World Interfaith Harmony Week on Ballarat, ca 80km NW of Trentham. After a flag-raising in front of St Peter's Anglican Church, Bishop Gary Weatherhill had two bits of advice inside the church for the representatives of faith-communities: 1. 'don't talk too much, but listen, listen deeply'; 2. 'don't stay in your silo'

My trip to Ballarat served three purposes: first to take part and learn from what happens, then to catch up with friends in the interfaith movement and also to bring my leaflets along to inform and invite people to join the interfaith project in Trentham. By then I feel like a traveling salesman who promotes something that is both priceless and not for sale.

Bishop Gary's advice gave me a 'sales pitch': "when did you last listen deeply to **yourself?**" and there I got a first response to the theme: "Love yourself as your neighbour" (see leaflet attached), especially from someone who works with children in homes under Government care. She is confronted by a lack of self-worth in the children all the time.

On the 7th of February at Evera itself, four people participated in the meditative walk and in the following conversation: two social workers, for whom confrontation with 'lack of self-worth' in their clients is a daily experience and two senior high school students, who listened with interest to the conversation and for whom the notion of being grateful for life made sense as a way of understanding life as a gift, regardless whether the Giver is known by name or not... They recognized themselves as of the same generation as Greta Thunberg and one of them found that a school-strike is not something you ask permission for: you do.

Part 2

A session planned for the 14th of February had to be cancelled because of sudden Covid related restrictions. This session was partly rescheduled for the 28th.

This time there were 7 participants on the walk and 5 stayed to participate in the conversation after lunch.

This time the walk was clearly structured with an awareness that one enters a "dialogical space", where – for 14 years now – conversations have been going on, not only during the walks and meditations, but also imagined as continuing in our absence... Those permanent sites, dedicated to 12 different spiritual cultures, religions and world-views, begin to show a pattern at 4 different levels, from the deepest to the most recent:

Humanism (evolution of consciousness) – Aboriginal/Indigenous – Hinduism
Buddhism – Shinto – Dao
Judaic – Islamic – Christian
Zoroastrian – Sikh - Baha'i

Zoroastrian: Zarathustra's teachings on light and dark, good and evil, have acquired an actuality in urgent need of realization beyond the conceptual frameworks of philosophy and religion: the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki and now the systemic and global nature of corruption, racial and religious violence need to be recognized as a real presence in the world, as a Being or Beings that 'live' and 'feed' on whatever human goodness and vitality can be undermined for its existence. Zoroastrians name for it is Ahriman, Spirit of Darkness. Since the Black Lives Matter' and 'All Life Matters' movement the word 'systemic' has become a common term for this all-pervasive dark presence. Hence my inclusion of

Zoroastrianism in the most recent 'chapters in the book of religions', as the Baha'i people would call it.

Our imaginary triangular fields of inter-religious conversations overlap each other, so that the pilgrim becomes aware of resonances, counter-points, parallels and polarities in teachings and in practices when walking the earth as their 'common ground' and the 'golden rule' as their 'common law'. (see diagram attached)

In the conversation I pointed to the World Interfaith website's banner, which says: '*Love of God – Love of the Good – Love of the Neighbour*'. The original '*as yourself*' is apparently taken for granted, even though lack of self-esteem, self-worth and its opposite: over-claimed self-importance, self-interest, self-freedom and so on, are the pathology of our time.

"The human spirit, the true self, listening deeply into concerns with the world and with oneself, attentive to what may resonate or transpire from different levels of experience: soul...life...body...the inner self, through which the spirit is to be present and alive in the world: (In his latest book) the social commentator and psychologist Hugh Mackay calls it 'the joy of discovering who you really are'. This sense of joy and human dignity would prevent anyone from violating the dignity of others, especially from doing so in the name of religion." (Quoted from my report in the local Trentham Newsletter, 20 February 2021)

Two things stood out in the conversation: 1. "love yourself" sounds overstated, as if it pays too much attention to oneself, sounds selfish and so on...2. "listen deeply to yourself" brings immediately a sense of what I have done wrong or should have done better...In the discussion personal experiences and perceptions brought clarity on both issues. One example: someone who has never been able to walk without tension, because of an inherited condition, was for the first time walking in a relaxed way, thanks to a Feldenkrais treatment. Here the love of self becomes discovering life as gift, a joy in one's own gain without any notion of selfishness attached.

Personally I had understood the listening as a listening for one's human condition, our constitution of body, life, soul and spirit, our common 'anthropology', the study of the human being as a whole.

The shift from the original "as yourself" to "as your neighbour" may help to shift attention away from "what did I do wrong" and may help to become realistic about yourself: as your own closest neighbour, as the first one you want and need to be "at peace" with, you might become quite sober in your expressions of self-love, but have also empathy with yourself when you discover all you have done wrong...

This last thought becomes clearer when I write this report.

We ended the conversation by reading together the text 'From Fire Being to Light-Being', given by the spiritual teacher Shin Gwydion Fontalba, which characterizes in 9 steps, from birth to adulthood, the way and growth process toward a mature self-love. It's safe to say, that everyone recognized himself/herself in the clarity of this life-affirming gift...

In gratitude.

Henk Bak

Evera Trentham 2 March 2021

Attachments:

1. Leaflet
2. Diagram of overlapping and intersecting conversations
3. From Fire Being to Light Being - Note: This text is under copyright, only to be used for study and conversation... For information about Shin Gwydion Fontalba visit website: minilit.org or www.evera-ecosophy.com.au
4. Photos