

Concepts of Home - Physical and Spiritual

Lyanne Mitchell - Sunday 2nd October 2011

As most of you know, Hugh and I have recently relocated to the Isle of Bute for our retirement years. Selling our home after 31 years of family life and buying a new one beside the sea, has led me to ponder on some concepts of 'HOME'.

What makes a home? Is it the 4 walls? Our belongings? The person or people we share it with? Is the meaning of home all of these and also much deeper values such as security? safety? being accepted fully as ourselves?

What does 'HOME' mean to you? The place you live, certainly; is home a place connected to your history, heritage, friends, family, country? Someone wrote (source unknown) - *'Our literal home is a sacred mythic place, even for non religious people. We all believe in a special space within and beyond our own doorsteps that simply cannot be violated. This is MY place, where I can close the door on chaos and find some kind of cosmos, peace, assurance of purpose. This is mine. Here I belong.'*

As we packed our Clarkston home into 50 boxes, I came across lots of things I had not seen for years - drawn or written by our children, all kinds of memories in the form of photos and beloved objects, which led to tears of nostalgia. I asked myself, what was I going to miss most by leaving our family home?

Who was it said - 'Home is where the heart is'?

.....and, like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz....if we click the heels of our ruby slippers together and repeat 3 times - *'There's no place like Home'*, will we be magically transported back there?

I think it was the poet Robert Frost who wrote - *'Home is the place when you go there, they have to take you in!'* I like that one.

One finite meaning of home is not an easy concept to isolate. It seems to encompass a broad sphere of emotional experience, sensory perception, memory and feelings of nostalgia. For many native peoples, like the Australian Aboriginals, home relates directly to the land - they feel displaced from the city, their traditional lands represent places where they experience safety and wholeness.

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Home is a central characteristic of our everyday lives - but it seems to be something most of us take for granted. It protects us, connects us with all the

simple rituals of life, comfort, relationships, relatives, friends and all that gives meaning to our lives. How can we take it for granted?

The Art Critic, novelist, poet, and screenwriter John Berger writes the following on the deeper meanings of home:-

'Originally home meant the centre of the world - not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense. A sense of being. Home was the place from which the world could be founded. A home was established 'at the heart of the real'.

In traditional societies, everything that made sense of the world was real; the surrounding chaos existed and was threatening but it was threatening because it was unreal. Without a home at the centre of the real, one was not only shelterless, but also lost in non-being, in unreality. Without a home, everything was fragmentation.

Home was the centre of the world because it was the place where the vertical line crossed with the horizontal line. The vertical line was a path leading upwards to the sky and downwards to the underworld. The horizontal line represented the traffic of the world, all possible roads leading across the earth to other places. Thus, at home, one was nearest to the gods in the sky and to the dead in the underworld. This nearness promised access to both. And at the same time, one was at the starting point and hopefully, the returning point of all terrestrial journeys.' (words on home by John Berger.)

When human beings are uprooted from home, they experience severe trauma - after a break-in, or loss of home through natural disaster, or a relationship split - even moving house is high up on the list of human traumas and stress.

Most of us here have experienced some time in our lives when we were 'spiritually homeless'. I certainly did. When I could no longer subscribe to the Church of Scotland and finally realised that I was not an atheist, I set out to search for a fellowship such as this, where I could be accepted with all my doubts and differences....where I could feel respected and secure. Where I hoped I would find support and comfort during dark days....and most important of all, where I could develop my own ideas and beliefs in a spirit of freedom.

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My question this morning is - are we in danger of taking for granted, this, our spiritual home? and the precious freedom it gives us to be who we need to be?

Our VISION DAY - Sunday 30th October approaches and I would like to suggest we prepare for this by asking ourselves some questions which may help us to more fully appreciate what we have here - and may help us in our discussions and debates at the end of this month to develop and grow further as a liberal faith fellowship.

Criteria and concepts about our *physical* home are not a million miles away from those about our *spiritual* home. I have been asking myself the following questions about my deeper feelings about GUC, which I chose as my spiritual home over 30 years ago.....

The four walls? Do we need more space? Do we need to use it differently? Do we need an improved space? - we have that, thanks to the hard work of various working committees.

The people? Do we feel harmony and respect for those who share our spiritual home? Can we make more effort to improve our personal relationships here?

Do we feel safe here? Are we secure? Are we too safe here? Are we too secure? Do we need more challenges which differ from refurbishment and budget restraints?

Do we feel accepted for who we are? Could we make more effort to accept others?

Do we take for granted the freedom we enjoy here to doubt ? to debate? to disagree? on religious / spiritual matters?

Do we feel this place and what we do and say here is at the centre of our spiritual world...our sense of 'real? Remembering John Berger's description....are we connected vertically here to our highest values - and to the earth below? and out, horizontally, to the world and others outside our circle? (I feel that it may be the horizontal bit that needs strengthening?)

When I was in the City of Bath recently, I saw a pulpit poster outside the magnificent Bath Abbey - it read - '*This is where Heaven meets Earth*'. I had

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some time on my hands, so I went in to the informal evening service out of curiosity. The lesson was from the bible - the familiar Old Testament story of Moses leading the fleeing Israelites through the parting of the Red Sea - and the Egyptians following and drowning as the sea closed again after the chosen people had passed through. The young priest assumed that we all closely identified with the Israelites and that God would look after us, even at our darkest hour. The Unitarian inside me wanted to ask - '*What about the*

Egyptians?'..... Heaven failed to meet earth for me in Bath Abbey - it is not my spiritual home.

Now that I am further away from GUC, I thought I would visit one or two of the local churches on the Island of Bute. I attended the tiny Episcopal church a few Sundays ago. I was warmly welcomed. Someone kindly helped me to find my way through the responses and liturgies....the Nicene Creed was repeated.....communion was given.....hymns were sung....then another young priest gave a brief sermon and spoke of the looting and social unrest in London and other cities South of the border. He called for compassion and informed understanding for those who are so needing the love of God. The entire service was unsurprisingly bible based - thanks were given for 'the word of God'....and again, the Unitarian inside me felt cramped and restricted by the service's exclusive dependence on the original 'Good Book' and the rigid creed, repeated so reverently. Again, although the congregation could not have been more welcoming or friendly - this is not my spiritual home.

I have one more final question - how would I feel..... how would we feel..... if we were uprooted from this place? If it no longer existed?. If it disappeared or closed its doors? How much would we miss it? Would we miss,(as an earlier quote said of physical home,) *'some kind of unique cosmos here? Peace? Assurance of purpose? A place where we belong?'*

I have thrown out a lot of questions at you this morning - forgive me - but I hope by answering them for yourselves, like me, you will discover that despite temporary frustrations and passing difficulties or personal tensions, this fellowship of ours is infinitely precious. It is so easy to lose sight of the bigger picture when we become exhausted by duty or get tangled up in temporary set-backs and struggles.

When we gather here together, let us never take this place for granted and may we share ideas that will build and strengthen what we already value here, in order that we may share it with others. Whether they may be physically homeless or lost in a state of spiritual homelessness, may our doors and hearts be open.

Thank you for listening.
