



SATSANG

In - Dwelling

**Newsletter of the SATSANG Association
(UK Midlands & North)**

Aug/Sept 2005

Editor Peter Creagh

Editor's Address: - 5 School Close, Shifnal, Shropshire TF11 8SH Tel 01952 462190

Be the Change You Wish to See

'Be the change you wish to see in the world 'Mahatma Gandhi

These words of Gandhiji came to mind as I reflected upon the recent events in our world. Once again, during the past few months, we have witnessed the destructive power of anger and violence. The bombings in Egypt, in Turkey and in London are further evidence, if we need any, of the tensions and destructive powers that exist. They have caused pain and suffering to those directly involved and have impacted on our global awareness.

Each of these seems, to me, to be further attempts to drive a wedge between peoples, and particularly between the West and our Islamic neighbours. Thankfully, unlike the reaction in the 1970's to the Birmingham bombings, there has been no major reaction by the British population against their Muslim neighbours. Yet, in 1970, we witnessed a very negative reaction against Irish people. So, it would appear that in the past 30 years our increasingly multi-cultural and diverse society has changed for the good.

Winston Churchill, speaking during the East –West tensions that occurred after the 2nd World War, famously said '***It is better to jaw jaw than to war war***'. There is much that is right with that statement. Of course dialogue is very important as is tolerance and our world can desperately do with both. However, in one of his last meditations, Anthony De Mello cautioned us about an over –reliance on dialogue and tolerance. He suggested that dialogue can often merely turn out to be an attempt by each side to '***convince***' the other that their position is correct and that tolerance can degenerate into merely tolerating but not really listening to others. He suggests that each of us needs to begin to think and to become aware that we are all ignorant of the real truth. This Truth is essentially a Mystery at the heart of everything. That 'Mystery' is known by many different names in different cultures and religions. But that 'Mystery' is essentially one that brings unity in diversity. It is the underlying Truth which we all (need to) instinctively seek.

Reflecting on all this and on Gandhi's words, I feel that our task is to begin to realise who we really are and how we are each related to the other. We need to begin to understand how the 'programming' of our culture, religion, society and life often blinds us to the underlying unity of all peoples. Our world requires each and every one of us to begin to 'think clearly', to realise that what unites us is stronger than the apparent divisions that can cause disunity. Each of us needs to be the change we wish to see in the world. This is where the ideals of the Satsang and its Triple Commitment can begin to help us all to focus on what it is that our world really needs.

AN INNER AND OUTER JOURNEY

Reflections on a Pilgrimage in the Steps of St Paul and St John

These reflections are a record of my experiences during a recent pilgrimage to Turkey and Greece. The pilgrimage was undertaken by a small group of Christians from St Andrews Parish in Shifnal and was led by Father Graham Fowell. As this was a Christian Pilgrimage most of the references are to Christian Scriptures. So to my many non-Christian friends of other faiths who may read this, I ask them to imagine going on a pilgrimage to their own sacred places.

Setting the Scene – Part 1 of Three Parts (Parts 2 & 3 will follow later)

'It is better to travel than to arrive'. These words convey the essence of what it is to undertake a pilgrimage. In these modern times we, who undertake a pilgrimage, compared to the hazards faced by ancient pilgrims, travel in relative comfort, luxury and ease. However, every pilgrimage is one that involves both the outer, physical journey and the inner spiritual journey. These reflections share some aspects of both the inner and outer journey.

The Outer Journey involves visiting places and being immersed in the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and experiences of the new places and cultures visited. It also includes some of the thoughts and feelings outlined in these reflections. However, the more important journey was and is the Inner Journey. This was more reflective and involved the 'breaking down' of the barriers which can so often leave the outer journey 'out there' and thus fail to reflect on what real meaning this outer journey has for my spiritual relationship with God – Absolute Reality. But first a few points which will set these reflections in a context.

It is impossible to adequately convey the richness of the experiences of such an intense pilgrimage. Also, we only touched on some aspects of St Paul's three missionary journeys and some parts of the journeys of St John the Divine and his connection with the Seven Churches of Asia Minor. I have recorded the main parts of the Outer Journey and also many reflections and insights into my Inner Journey. Throughout the pilgrimage I was reminded of aspects of a former pilgrimage I undertook with Sister Ishpriya, my wife Angela and a group of companions about ten years ago in Northern India. Like India, Turkey and Greece are lands steeped in the history of great civilisations, legend and spirituality.

For Christians, apart from the Holy Land, Turkey and Greece contain the records and 'footprints' of the earliest signs of the growth of the infant Christian Church. St Paul journeyed through this region and St John the Divine, the reputed author of the 4th Gospel, who preached in Ephesus and was exiled to Patmos where he received and recorded the message of the Risen Jesus in his Revelations to the seven churches in Asia Minor.

Asia Minor Asia Minor is rich in antiquities and archaeological sites. It contains sites that pre-date the Greek civilisation and is also rich in Roman, Byzantine (Christian) and Islamic culture. However, These sites are only the outward and physical signs of the richness of the inner and spiritual legacy which this region holds and has passed on to us in modern times.

Since ancient times people have built great cities and have constructed great structures and temples. Although these had elements of man's pride and tendency to show off his power, in ancient times they were mainly built to express the divine and the spiritual. Some examples are, the pre-Celtic structures at Newgrange in Ireland, which are 500 years older than the pyramids, the pyramids, Stonehenge in England, the great Hindu and Buddhist sites, particularly along the sacred river Ganges, the civilisations of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the Acropolis and the Mayan Temples of Mexico. All are monuments to man's desire and spiritual urge to express his relationship with God.

Consequently, all pilgrimages to sacred sites are opportunities to not only admire, wonder and marvel at the labour and inventiveness of man but, more importantly, relate these sites to our own time, our own life and our own inner journey and relationship with God, the Ultimate Reality.

ISTANBUL – Gateway to the Pilgrimage

A bridge between two cultures and two faiths

We landed late on the evening of our first day in Istanbul, the gateway to Asia Minor. We were met by our wonderful guide Ferit, a young Muslim Turk who was to be our trusty and most efficient companion throughout our stay in Turkey. (I will record more on Ferit later) Istanbul is a wonderfully vibrant city, formerly called Constantinople. It was named after the Roman Emperor Constantine who, in the 4th century made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire. It was the capital of the Byzantine Empire for over 1000 years. Although Istanbul is not directly connected with either St Paul or St John, it is nonetheless an important city for both Christians and Muslims and was a wonderful gateway to our pilgrimage.

After Constantine made Christianity the state religion, Constantinople grew in importance. It is built on seven hills and began to rival Rome in its importance and splendour. In a very small area of the modern city and set on the European side of the Bosphorus, there are several very important Christian and Muslim sites. The earliest Byzantine Church of St Irene (dedicated to Divine Peace) still stands. This is where the 2nd Ecumenical (Christian) Council took place. Nearby stands the great basilica of St Sophia (Divine Wisdom). An impressive building, and once the largest church in Christianity, it was also the seat of the Patriarch of the Greek (Eastern) Church for almost 1000 years. When the Ottomans seized Constantinople they converted St Sophia to a Mosque but they left much of the Christian mosaics untouched and these still survive today. Ironically, St Sophia suffered much more desecration at the hands of the Crusaders, fellow Christians, when they sacked Constantinople. So as far as St Sophia is concerned, the Islamic Ottoman rulers were more tolerant than the warlike Crusaders.

Near to both St Irene and St Sophia stand two other important Muslim sites, the Topaki Palace and the famous Blue Mosque. The former was that seat of government of the Ottoman Sultans. Inside the Topaki Palace is a special museum that holds many sacred relics of Islam, including several relics of Mohammed the Prophet (Peace be upon him). This is a site revered by Muslims. The Blue Mosque is one of the most prominent in Islam and certainly in Turkey. So in a small area stand several sites sacred and important to both Christians and Muslims. In these challenging and demanding times, where there is a perception of a 'clash' between Christian and Islamic cultures, it was wonderful to note that here in Istanbul, these two cultures have lived together for almost 600 years and have each brought a richness and a diversity which benefit the city.

A Spiritual Bridge

But for me the most spiritually relevant part of my two days in Istanbul, was a short cruise along the Bosphorus. As we sailed under the great bridge that connects Europe to Asia and the western and European part of Istanbul to the eastern and Asian part, I was struck by its deep symbolic significance. Here was a physical and outward sign of a spiritual and inner truth. Christianity, which for hundreds of years was represented by the western side of the city and Islam, represented by the eastern side. And there towering above me was the bridge, a symbol of their underlying unity in God!

I was reminded that we are all children of the One Ultimate Reality, Allah or by whatever name we call God. We are all inter-connected in the Spirit through and to the Ultimate Reality. We share so much more in our common humanity and spiritual heritage than that which seemingly divides us. We are, just like the Bosphorus Bridge, connected together by the bridge of the Spirit. So we share in true Satsang or in other words, a true spiritual companionship. I found myself offering up a prayer that we may all come to realise the truth of our common inheritance and have the wisdom to avoid being influenced by the fundamentalists that exist in all Faith Traditions. It seems to me that the fundamentalists focus on the differences between us and also on a very simplistic and inherently wrong idea of what it is to be a person of faith. They also fail to either recognise or acknowledge the underlying Unity (God) which connects us all together. It seems to me that fundamentalists, of all persuasions, attempt to build their version of God's kingdom and seem unable to live in harmony with their brothers and sisters in God's Kingdom.

So we finished our two days in Istanbul, enjoying a stroll in the late evening and 'drinking in' the vibrancy of this wonderful city. Our next stage was to fly to Izmir, Turkey's 3rd city to begin our visits to the seven churches of St John the Divine and also Ephesus.

Peter Creagh

SATSANG ASSOCIATION NOTICES

LOCAL SATSANG PROGRAMME

DATE	DETAILS
Sat 10 th Sept	A Half – Day Meeting (1.30 – 4.30) Theme to be decided from the Cave of the Heart Series plus AGM (IN WOLVERHAMPTON)
Sat 8 th Oct	A Day of Reflection Theme RELAXATION 10.30- 4.30 (see details on separate page & ISA Website) To be decided on at our AGM in September
Other Months	To be decided on at our AGM in September

Our meetings are held at the Friends Meeting House Wolverhampton, 1.30 to 4.45 p.m. Note that some meetings are held in Manchester. These are announced in advance.

NOTICE OF AGM

Our AGM will be held on Sat 10th Sept
We are not able to meet at the Friends Meeting House so we will meet at 5 School Close Shifnal TF 11

We intend to agree an annual programme of events plus reflect on our partnering with Guadalajara and our new partners for 2005/06 California North.

This is a very important meeting. We will have our normal meditation/Silent Prayer, Topic and a time for sharing and mutual support.

However, we also need to formally look at the Treasurer's Report, decide our next year's programme and look at ways of improving and strengthening our Local Association

MAKE A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

PARTNERING

ADIOS COMPADRES: Guadalajara

In 2004/2005 we were fortunate to have as our initial partners, our friends from Guadalajara. This was a new venture and doubtlessly we can all learn from it and reflect on ways of deepening our connections in the world-wide Satsang. However, it has been good and we were grateful for the contact with our Mexican friends. Thanks particularly for their supportive and prayerful message in the aftermath of the London Bombings. We wish Guadalajara well and say 'Until we meet again'

HI to California North

Our new partners for 2005/2006 are California North. We look forward with eagerness to building bridges with our companions in the USA. We have doubtlessly learned from our Mexican friends and hope to improve the communication between the two local Area Satsangs. All Satsang Members and Companions in the Midlands and North are asked to put forward ideas on how we can develop our communication links with our new and old partners.

VISIT BY ISHPRIYA

London March 2006

The Satsang Association (UK South and West) will host a visit by Ishpriya in March 2006. The day(s) are Sat 25th March and possibly something on Sun 26th. Further details will be provided but reserve the date(s) in your diary.