

Hamilton Quaker Newsletter

February 2025



Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. Do not be persuaded into buying what you do not need or cannot afford. Do you keep yourself informed about the effects your style of living is having on the global economy and environment?

Advices and Queries #41

Upcoming Events and Announcements

PSAC will meet online at 7:45 p.m. on Monday, February 10. Please use the regular Meeting for Worship Zoom link.

Canadian Friends Service Committee advocacy work in Ottawa has identified a real potential to advance a Guaranteed Livable Basic Income in Canada. The newest edition of *Quaker Concern* explains all about GLBI. There will be an online discussion about GLBI on Wednesday, February 12 at 7:00 p.m. EST. Friends can register to join the conversation at <https://QuakerService.ca/>

There will be a Memorial Meeting for long-time Friend Dick Preston on Saturday, February 15 at 2 p.m. at the Meeting House. An obituary can be found at <https://www.richardpreston.ca/In-Memoriam>

There will be a brown bag discussion after meeting on Sunday, February 16 to provide Ministry and Counsel with input for the State of Society Report.

Friday, February 21 is CYM Meeting for Sharing Our News. This was instituted a year or two ago to compensate for the fact that we get together as a Yearly Meeting or a Representative Meeting much more rarely now that we are doing so much business online. It's a time just to tell other Friends of things going on in our Meetings that might not be the kind of thing that would get in a newsletter or the *Canadian Friend*. All Friends are welcome to attend, but only Friends from those Meetings whose names start with O to Z will speak at this particular meeting. The online gathering starts at 7 p.m. EST, and the link is

<https://uso6web.zoom.us/j/85293838998?pwd=y3PsTellpaGCHHzuwli3AGbNSqUOFv.1>

Meeting ID: 852 9383 8998

Passcode: CYM1955

The next meeting of the Reading group will be on Sunday, February 23, from 7 to 8 p.m. in our Zoom space. Reading material has yet to be determined. Please contact Shirla (shirla766@gmail.com) to be added to the participant list.

The next Meeting for Worship for Business will be held in person at the Meeting House on Sunday, March 2 at 12:30 p.m. You can also join us online on our regular Meeting Zoom link.

From Bev Shepard: In the past few months I have, on a couple of occasions, sung a chant in meeting, but only singing it once. The type of chant I was singing is the Taizé sort, where one simple line is repeated many times, with harmonies and other variations arising in the group singing it. Some Friends are familiar with this, and spoke to me after my mini-contribution to say we should all sing the chant in the way it was meant to be sung. So I'm offering to lead a session of Taizé-style chant sometime if there is enough interest. Please contact me if you'd like to participate in such an occasion, and give me an idea of the sort of time that would work for you.

Save the Date! The Hamilton Monthly Meeting retreat will be held at Camp NeeKauNis from Friday, May 30 to Sunday June 1, 2025.

Canadian Yearly Meeting in session in 2025 will be entirely online, June 12-15, 2025. There will be a blended (in-person and online) gathering in 2026, with the in-person portion taking place at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 19-24, 2026.

Canadian Friend has issued a call for submissions. The theme of the summer 2025 issue will be belonging. Where do we come from, who are our people, where do we feel seen and held, to whom are we responsible, where (and whom) do we call home, or family? And related to all this, what does it mean to belong as a Friend in the year 2025, especially when Quakerism as a faith (and practice) is so adaptable? Essays on membership and attendership, community, family and identity, among others, are welcome. Apply the theme as you see fit! Reviews of related books are also welcome. Send pitches, submissions, and questions to editor@quaker.ca. The deadline for pitches is February 15, and for finished articles is March 31. You can find full submission guidelines at quaker.ca/cympublications/.

Former Hamilton Monthly Meeting attender Rajmohan Ramanathapillai would like to make Friends aware of the recent publication of his book *Turtles Without a Sandy Beach*. This book records the memories of Sri Lankan Tamils who lived through three decades of war through poetry and nature photography. The book can be ordered through Amazon.

Cookies and Carols

by Harriet Woodside

One of the many consequences of the Covid lockdown was the cancellation of our annual holiday "Cookies and Carols" event. Pre-Covid, many of us enjoyed baking cookies which we plated and delivered to those among us who weren't able to get out or who needed a bit of a lift. Besides the cookies, we brought Christmas song sheets and usually enjoyed singing together before going on to the next stop.

It was with great joy that we restarted "Cookies and Carols" this past December. The First Day School kids had fun packaging the homemade treats and making cards which many of us signed. Two carloads delivered the cookies; we made a total of five stops.

I was one of the deliverers, both in the past and also this year. It feels good to do kind things at Christmas, but I didn't expect to be so moved by the three stops my team made. One was to drop cookies off to a Friend who is in a care facility. We found her sitting with about six others staring at a movie I knew she'd watched many times before. She beamed when she recognized some of us. The movie was turned off and our Friend graciously offered the cookies to her friends. Then we passed out the song sheets and had a lively sing-along which our Friend helped lead. We certainly could have stayed longer. I felt as if our Friend underwent a transition while we were there from a passive resident to the gracious hostess that I remember. It's corny but her transition felt a bit like a Christmas miracle.

There is a special story that goes with each of the other four stops too. I was reminded that we all appreciate small kindnesses. They bring more joy than you might imagine to those who receive and offer them.

Design

by Sheldon Clark

There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. (Hamlet. V. ii.)

Design is captured in sightless leaves
icy spider-webbed windows
springtime's gamboling energy
summertime's endeavours
long days short nights
Fortune's wheel transcends privilege or poverty.

Design varies by happenstance, circumstance
ridges, savannahs, jungles, ice floes,
monsoons, temperate climes, urban clamor
the unpredictable mystery, warning
"Expect the Unexpected"
Death prepares for rebirth.

Design is surgically precise in execution
spontaneous like jazz variations
ominous as slow-motion accidents
fatal as rock climbing slips-and-falls
evil as blunt force to body, head, or heart
the Reaper awaits aloof.

Design endows visions dreams possibilities
attentive to Love's omnipresence
embracing gestation's darkness
birthing hope at dawn's light

welcoming faith, grace
sans pareil Spirit's Being.

Design surrounds Death's fidelity
partners hold its birthright in trust
inaudible expression
decisive separation crossed
we are here-and-now
beings loving beings.



A Friendly Conversation about Death

by Robbie Shepard

A group of Hamilton Monthly Meeting members and attenders sat together after Meeting for Worship on First Day, January 19, 2025 to share our thoughts and feelings about death.

Our discussion revealed a range of perspectives on the subject, with some expressing a serene acceptance of death as a natural and inevitable part of life, while others conveyed a more emotional approach, focusing on the spiritual turmoil and life-changing experiences for the bereaved which the death of a family member often brings. The conversation included reflections on the Quaker belief in the inner light and how it guides us through life's final transition. There was an unsurprising consensus on the importance of living a life of integrity and compassion, as these values shape not only our present existence but also the legacy left behind. Our talk was at times deeply moving, with personal anecdotes and philosophical musings, resulting in a profound sense of community and shared understanding among us all.

The conversation touched briefly on the practical aspects of death, including Quaker traditions surrounding funerals and memorials, which emphasize simplicity and reflection. We are acutely aware of the significance of two recent deaths in our meeting in which MAID (medical assistance in dying) was chosen by the dying. Since we knew in advance the exact times for each of these deaths, our Meeting was able to hold a simultaneous vigil. We shared our thoughts on how our practices, old and new, honour the deceased while providing solace to the bereaved. One of us described the distressing circumstance in which some people must spend their final days trapped in a bleak medical setting which, though it may prolong life, affords neither comfort nor dignity. Another expressed a wish not to be kept alive "past the point of usefulness." We talked briefly about Quaker responses to suicide.

The role of our close-knit community in supporting each other through grief was celebrated, highlighting the collective strength we find in shared silence and communal support. Our discussion concluded with a circle of silence and a poignant sense of the interconnectedness of all life, and the enduring significance of our actions and relationships, both in this life and beyond.

The Ship

by Siân Bowen-Cole

What is dying? I am standing on the seashore, a ship sails in the morning breeze and starts for the ocean. She is an object of beauty and I stand watching her till at last she fades on the horizon and someone at my side says: "She is gone." Gone! Where? Gone from my sight -- that is all.

She is just as large in the masts, hull and spars as she was when I saw her, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to its destination.

The diminished size and total loss of sight is in me, not in her, and just at the moment when someone at my side says, "She is gone" there are others who are watching her coming, and other voices take up a glad shout: "There she comes!" -- and that is dying.

Bishop Charles Henry Brent (1862-1926)

My mother tried really hard to help me understand death. She was a nurse and had lost her own father when she was twenty. She had an uphill task, and giving me a copy of Bishop Brent's words was one of her many attempts to discuss a subject I didn't want to talk about. However, it lay on my bedside table for years. It really spoke to me, and the image of departed loved ones greeting a soul as they move into the hereafter is one that often comes to me.

During her last days I sat by mum's bedside; I read aloud her favourite poems and the stories I had loved that she read to me as a child, and played music she enjoyed. I came to realize she had given me a gift in preparing me for her death.

Later, as my dad, my sister and I sat in her room, she gently slipped away listening to *Lark Ascending*, by Vaughan Williams. Many years earlier she had told me "when I die, I want to imagine myself flying up to heaven like the Lark."

Thoughts on Death and Dying

by Beverly Shepard

At the discussion on Sunday afternoon after worship on January 19th, there was much affirmation of the belief that spirit exists and endures. I told of an experience Carol Leigh and I had some years ago, when we visited the property in Missouri which had been the home of our two great-aunts. We both felt the spirit of those remarkable women, even though there was little left of the home they had known. It was so profound an experience that I wrote a poem about it. I quoted the last few lines on Sunday, and I was asked to share the whole poem. Here it is, but it's preceded by an earlier one, inspired when we went to that same property after both the sisters had died, to ready it for sale. Some of the same feelings were evoked then, as we felt their indomitable spirits in the home where they had lived all their lives.

Old Lace

It drifts and drapes over my fingers,
yard after yard of it,
creamy with age,
some of it delicate as cobwebs;
some heavy and rich, like custard.
Here is a piece cut from the hem of –
what? a petticoat? –
that was outgrown or outworn
while the lace lasted
and was preserved;
and here are pieces barely begun,
an inch or two,
the pattern just emerging.

We rescued it,
in the padded silk burgundy box
with the flowers hand-painted on the top,
from the house where the three sisters
lived from childhood,
the house their father built with his own hands,
digging the well,
carving the dresser,
hewing the cellar from the hard-packed earth.
Only one sister departed
to marry and become, in time,
my grandmother;
but two grew and aged and died there.

And how did those hands
that sowed the seeds and pulled the weeds,
fed the chickens and slaughtered them,
drew the water from the well and cut the wood
for the fires to heat it,
plucked the fruits and put them by
in jars that lined the rough shelves
with soft shining in the cellar's gloom:
how did they turn to this work of glory
from their necessary labours?

After tilling God's earth or reaping its bounty,
did the sisters sit in the evening,
their tired backs against cushions of chicken down
they themselves had saved and sewn up,
tattling and crocheting in the dim light –
kerosene, for years –
while they listened to the evening sermon on the radio?

Or did they save it for Sunday,
the day of rest,
after church,
hardly considering it work because it was lovely?

Oh, what a store of beauty their hearts must have held!

For Emily and Anna

Just here,
At this place in the road,
Which then was red rocks and clay
But now is paved –
Here is where we first could see the house.
And it must have been about here
That we turned in:
Not a drive, exactly,
For they had no car;
But now we are guessing.
There is no place to turn,
No space to put a car.
We stop beside the road.

We stand looking into the wood:
There is nothing –
Nothing to see of human habitation.
We walk through last autumn's brown and fallen leaves,
Moving aside bare branches,
Stepping among weeds and vines
That catch at our feet as though to halt our progress.
Ah! – this line of squared stones

Must have been the house's foundation.
Yes, see – there is a corner.
So the porch, set directly on the earth,
Was here, by the stones,
Among the brown and fallen leaves.

Of the little barn,
The hen house
Nothing remains.
But look! – a few more stones,
These not set straight:
They must have made
A circle.
They barely show above the earth
(Earth shovelled in with human effort;
Even determined nature could not have filled
Those forty feet so soon),
But we know there is circle upon circle,
Lining the tall straight shaft
Down to the cool depths where flows unfailingly
The pure and precious water.

Here beside the well-house, I --
A three year-old with sunshine in her hair --
Sat and learned to shell corn
And strew it for the chickens
Clucking and crowding
with indifferent eagerness.

I was not frightened.
We knew no fear, then.
The world was beautiful,
And the great-aunts,
Aproned and beloved,

Knew all there was to know
Of life and growth and caring.

The garden is grown over now
With weeds and vines and youthful trees.
Once it was their livelihood;
Now it is just a part of this wild wood.
In March, I cannot say
If potatoes or carrots linger in the earth
Or beans and peas still creep among the milkweed,
But I can see that something lives and thrives
To prove their tending and devotion:
The daffodils,
Freed of their careful beds,
Have spread in their hundreds
Through the wood and weeds:
Gold and love and remembrance –
Not, perhaps, eternal,
But enough.



Birth, Death, and Consciousness

by Robbie Shepard

Many Quakers would agree with some version of the sentiment “we are all one” or “our lives are fundamentally connected”. Such feelings are echoes of an ancient tradition which is currently receiving widespread attention.

Advaita, or non-duality, is a concept from Indian philosophy, particularly associated with the school of Vedanta. It means “not two” and suggests that the true nature of reality is a fundamental oneness. In this view, the individual self (*Atman*) and the universal reality (*Brahman*) are not separate entities but are essentially the same.

Advaita teaches that the perception of duality — that we are separate from each other and from the world around us — is an illusion. An important goal of life is to experience the fundamental oneness of our existence deeply and see through the veil of separation, thereby achieving a state of liberation or enlightenment.

This teaching has a striking perspective on consciousness before birth and after death. According to *Advaita*, consciousness (*Brahman*) is eternal and unchanging. It is not created at birth, nor does it perish at death. Instead, consciousness (*Atman*) is the same as the universal reality (*Brahman*): infinite, and beyond all objects, beyond even concepts such as time and space.

In this view, what we perceive as birth and death are simply transitions of our physical manifestation, while the underlying consciousness remains unaffected and continuous. The belief is that our true self (*Atman*) transcends these physical changes and is ever-present: before birth, during life, and after death.

* * *

Here is a recent description of our experience of consciousness in early life, before the vicissitudes of physical existence obscure our innate oneness:

“For the first one or two years of life you were functioning from your true nature — from effortless being. There were sounds, feelings,

sensations, but there was no concept that you were separate from any of them or that they were personal to you. Gradually you were invited into a game, the game of duality and limitation.

“Your caregivers referred to you by a name and began to identify you as a body with certain characteristics. Initially, you played the game knowing that you remain as the one infinite being. You knew that nothing could ever harm or change your true nature. But as the game continued — as you were bombarded from all directions day in and day out with reinforcement of the idea that you are separate and limited -- gradually, yet inevitably you forgot your true nature.

“You forgot that you are the impersonal, infinite ocean of beingness.”

- David Bingham, *Effortless Being*

* * *

And here is a non-dual (if down-home) way of viewing the other end of life:

“The problem in middle life, when the body has reached its climax of power and begins to decline, is to identify yourself not with the body, which is falling away, but with the consciousness of which it is the vehicle. This is something I learned from myths. What am I? Am I the bulb that carries the light? Or am I the light of which the bulb is a vehicle?

“One of the psychological problems in growing old is the fear of death. People resist the door of death. But this body is a vehicle of consciousness, and if you can identify with the consciousness, you can watch this body go like an old car. There goes the fender, there goes the tire, one thing after another — but it’s predictable. And then, gradually, the whole thing drops off, and consciousness rejoins consciousness. It is no longer in this particular environment.”

- Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*

About this Newsletter / Submission Guidelines

This Newsletter is a monthly publication of news and announcements relevant to Hamilton Quakers.

It is also a venue for members and attenders to share creative works or articles they have written on subjects that may be of interest to our Quaker community. As a general guideline we are looking for submissions that are inspirational and related to Quaker concerns, as well as announcements and news. Members and Attenders are encouraged to submit works for the newsletter.

Requests for newsletter items are announced after Meeting for Worship and/or via email during the week before Meeting for Worship for Business. They are due by the Friday before Business Meeting. Submission of materials implies permission to publish. Copyright for original material resides with the author.

If the person submitting the article is unknown to the editor or if there are questions as to whether the article will be appropriate for the Quaker newsletter, the editor will consult with the clerk(s) who will together discern what will be included. Written permission to publish must be obtained from the copyright holder if a submission is not the original work of the submitter, unless the works are in the public domain, or are covered under the creative commons license.

Hamilton Meeting reserves the right to edit submissions for length or content in consultation with the authors. Please limit submissions to a maximum of 750 words. When opinion pieces are included a line will be added indicating "Submissions reflect the opinions of their authors, and not necessarily of Hamilton Monthly Meeting".

Submissions should be directed to the current editor, Síân Reid, daywitch@gmail.com.

We acknowledge the land upon which Hamilton Friends Meeting House is located as the shared traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabeg, protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt covenant. This historic peace agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy, the Ojibwe, and allied nations represents a commitment to share and protect the land, water, plants, and animals, with respect. It is the privilege of Hamilton Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to share in the tradition of stewardship of this land, which has been the environment of human beings in this territory for thousands of years. We honour the original Peoples of this land and express a commitment to and gratitude for the opportunity to work together toward restorative justice and reconciliation.