

**Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business**  
**Asheville Friends Meeting**  
**Eighth Month 13, 2023**

**Present:** Pat Johnson, Clerk, Kitti Reynolds, Recording Clerk, Robin Wells, Steve Livingston, Barbara Esther, Bobby Carter, Jim Cavener, Susanne Friedrichs, Zoe Wallace, Margaret Farmer, Vinnie Grossi, Jenna Walton, Joel O'Brian, Katherine Kowal, Margaret Normile, Adrienne Weir, Rusty Maynard, Rylin Hansen

**Present via Zoom:** Mike and Beth Eddy, Gita Larson, Ellie Cox, Ms. Bettie Council

The Meeting opened with Silent Worship.

The Clerk shared a reading out of silence.

**Trusting the Gold**

**Why Recognizing our Human Goodness May Be the Most Radical Act We Can Take**

Publisher: Sounds True; Illustrated edition © June 15, 2021, pp. 2-3. By Tara Brach

During the mid-1950s in Bangkok, Thailand, a huge clay statue of the Buddha began to crack due to heat and drought. When some monks arrived to investigate, they shined a flashlight into the largest of the cracks. What they saw surprised everyone. Deep under the gray clay was the gleam of gold.

No one had known that inside this popular but ordinary-looking statue was a solid-gold Buddha. As it turns out, the statue had been covered with plaster and clay six hundred years earlier to protect it from invading armies. Although all the monks who lived in the monastery at that time had been killed in the attack, the golden Buddha, its beauty and value covered over, had survived untouched.

Just as the monks disguised the beauty of the golden Buddha in order to protect it during dangerous times, we cover our own innate purity and goodness as we encounter a challenging world. As children many of us were criticized, ignored, misunderstood, or abused, leading us to doubt that gold within us. As we grow up, we increasingly internalize the judgments and values of our society, further losing touch with our innocence, our creativity, and our tender hearts. We cover over the

gold as we seek the approval of others, looking to them to measure our worth—to determine whether we are good enough, smart enough, successful enough.

Adding layer after layer to protect ourselves, we become identified with our coverings, believing ourselves to be separate, threatened, and deficient. Yet even when we cannot see the gold, the light and love of our true nature cannot be dimmed, tarnished, or erased. It calls to us daily through our longing for connection, our urge to understand reality, our delight in beauty, our natural desire to help others. Our deepest intuition is that there is something beyond our habitual story of a separate and isolated self: something vast, mysterious, and sacred.

**Minute #1:** The Meeting approved the agenda.

**Minute #2:** The Meeting approved the Seventh Month Business Meeting Minutes.

**Announcements:** Barbara Esther reminded us about the joy of working on a committee and how it keeps our community going. We will discuss our Meeting's committees on Eighth month 27.

The Meeting received a thank you note from Mary Jane Hall, Adrienne's mother.

A Celebration of Life for Christopher Foreman is scheduled for Ninth month 9 at 3:30 pm in the Meeting House. His internment will be at Carolina Memorial Sanctuary in Mills River at 1:00 pm the same day.

### **Committees:**

#### **Racial Justice Committee** - Steve Livingston

Steve encourages us to sign this pledge on line at [www.RJCAVL.org](http://www.RJCAVL.org). Some of us signed it as it was passed around on a clipboard.

We are asked to approve the Asheville Racial Justice Coalition's "Reparations Are Due Pledge" as an organization.

Here are the pledge commitments:

My organization knows that Reparations Are Due to all Black people in the United States through federal, state, and local action.

My organization stands with the Community Reparations Commission and has faith in their leadership and vision for our local Asheville and Buncombe County Reparations process.

My organization will encourage local elected representatives to take action, once the Recommendations of the Community Reparations Commission are finalized.

**Minute #3:** The Meeting approved the Racial Justice Coalition's "Reparations Are Due Pledge" as an organization.

Racial Justice Committee met on Aug 7, present were Gita Larson, Ellie Cox, Adrienne Weir, and Steve Livingston (interim clerk).

In the context of Vanessa Julye's call for "Radical Transformation" in the Society of Friends, we want to acknowledge that our Meeting community has indeed changed significantly in the past decade or so since the inception of our Racial Justice Committee. We recognize that as a community we have abandoned our previous perception of white supremacy culture as a distant aberration that did not pertain to us or to liberal Quakers, and acknowledged the pervasive presence of white supremacy both around us and among us. We are grateful for the collective efforts in our community to recognize the immediacy and impact of systemic, structural, and internalized racism, and the necessity of addressing and eliminating its characteristics as we strive to become a more anti-racist, multicultural faith community.

We are currently working to discern the way forward for our Meeting to fully embrace and embody Reparative Justice, especially as it pertains to Asheville's Black community. Working from a template provided by the Fund for Reparations Now!, we have been consulting with Meeting attenders Ms. Bettie Council and Landon Ward, as well as with Rob Thomas of Asheville's Racial Justice Coalition, to create a draft Statement of Apology, an essential step in the Truth and Reconciliation process in any Reparative Justice effort.

Rob connected us with Dr. Melchor Hall, co-director of the African American Education & Research Organization (AAERO), who has worked extensively with Quakers on Reparative Justice, both here in NC and at Pendle Hill. Dr. Hall facilitated the 2021

Pendle Hill extended virtual workshop "Aiming for Justice: Race Reparations and Right Paths." Ellie Cox participated in this month-long series that literally changed her life.

We have received some good advice that has helped us understand how to transform the largely generic document into a document that reflects our clear understanding of the harms that Asheville's Black communities have historically suffered, and continue to suffer to this day, and the manner in which these harms have been of benefit to ourselves and other White Ashevilleans. We have come to recognize that we do not yet have this clear understanding, and we feel immensely grateful that Way is opening for us to acquire it. Dr. Hall has offered to work with us deeply and extensively on this part of our journey. She proposes to consult with Black Asheville residents who are more representative of the people to whom our Statement of Apology would be addressed, to offer clarity and specificity to the Statement. She would then facilitate one or more sessions bringing our community together with these consultants, perhaps an intensive weekend, or one day a week for three consecutive weeks.

In keeping with our commitment to compensate Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color for sharing their expertise, experience, and wisdom with us to help us on our journey to become a more anti-racist, multicultural faith community, we offered an honorarium to Dr. Hall, but she declined. This is her calling, her work, and she assures us that she is able and eager to raise funds not only for the cost of her participation but for other folks from the Black community who ultimately join in this work. She is interested in chronicling this work with us for the benefit of her organization as well as to benefit other Quakers in NC and beyond.

We ask the Meeting to sit with this proposal, to discern whether we are led to unite with it, and commit to participate in this work moving forward, and to permit Dr. Hall to publicize the work in the future. We will report the Meeting's discernment to Dr. Hall, and if approved will report to the Meeting as the project unfolds. We expect a time frame of several months to a year or more. At this time we are inviting Friends to share your feelings about this opportunity and commitment, and we will try to answer any questions you want to raise.

**Minute #4:** The Meeting accepted this report and will discern further action next month. A Friend spoke in strong support of this initiative. Steve doesn't know if Dr. Hall will contact folks like Dwight Mullen with the RJC Reparations committee in Asheville. Dr.

Hall does not request any funds. A Friend reminds us that we have a loving community to share this journey with.

**Peace and Earth** - Mike Eddy

The Restricted Indigenous People's Fund proposal needs further refinement. We want to establish this but not run it ourselves. Satchel pointed out last month that we could just write a check to some native peoples organization such as one in Colorado. A Friend was uneasy with establishing a fund before we know what group it would go to. A Friend suggested we post in the Digest names of some of the organizations similar to what we would like to support. Mike said P&E would discuss the matter more at our next meeting. He didn't think the Digest was an appropriate place for naming these sample organizations.

Item 2. See below. The Meeting is asked to consider this statement on how we relate to people who identify as indigenous.

**Policy on Native Heritage Claims**

We accept without question the self-identification of any person who claims native heritage whether or not they present evidence of indigenous ancestors. It is not our place to judge any other person on the basis of their appearance, nor to dictate criteria for self-identification.

We respectfully acknowledge and celebrate the indigenous heritage of all of our Latinx sisters and brothers, regardless of whether or not they identify as indigenous, native, or any similar term.

We respectfully acknowledge and celebrate the indigenous heritage of all persons who identify as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander by virtue of a known ancestor of that heritage.

In all of our decision making processes that affect any Indigenous Nations or Indigenous people, we look to that Indigenous Nation or to citizens of that Indigenous Nation for advice, counsel, and guidance.

In addition to expression of gratitude for their assistance, we commit to compensating the Nation or the citizen(s) of that nation either monetarily or with appropriate gift(s).

Discussion: A Friend reported a Cherokee said it's not a matter of the percent of indigenous blood but your involvement with the community. A Friend who worked the census pointed out that we white people have been encouraging Latinx folks to consider themselves white and erase their indigeneity.

A Friend said that we need to consider how much time we could commit to these proposals. Some Friends are already fully committed in their time. A Friend thinks these two will add to each other. Every time he participates in reparations type activity he feels bolstered. A Friend points out that these things don't necessarily take away from each other. A Friend pointed out this work is for our children and grandchildren. We have lived a privileged life. A Friend shared the concern that we only have so much time and energy. And many of us already live a very full life. He doesn't want to work faster because it takes away from the Zen of what he does. If we have to change our lives then we need to understand that's what we are called to do. Clerk reminded us we are in community. Each of us can discern what is ours to do. If we work together we will learn something. A Friend spoke of pruning her commitments in order to participate in something new. Lift up all of our commitments and see where we are led. It's not like a pie but a garden - what do we want to tend now. Laying down some things for a short time or forever may be what is called for. We can renegotiate a commitment.

The Meeting closed with silent worship until the way opens for our next Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business in the Seventh Month, 2023.