

SOF Sift

A column in which Network members think out loud about SOF and their own quest.

*Bob Booth
Newhaven, E. Sussex*

I was tied down by a load of cultural baggage. I joined SOF and Quakers as I needed more spiritual freedom. I shook the sieve hard to get rid of the culture which I no longer needed or believed. I was born into a culture that included church-going, bible-classes, etc., with beliefs that were mythical, man-made and put into my mind as historical fact. As we are the most 'social' of all living creatures we do want to belong and relate – perhaps supported by habit and ritual. In church I found a cultural focus that was partly spiritual. Then I did not see that the 'Holy' spirit was based on the universal human spirit.

I started to think about thinking – about the mental functions of reason, culture and emotion and the difficulty of separating them. Aiming for a cleaner less prejudiced logic I dared to look at the realities of our biological and social basics. I found the facts of our existence humbling – not just personally but for our species. Shaking out the detritus of culture and looking at what is left can be more disturbing if one is not in a community for sharing and modifying views. Accepting that each of us has one of 7,987,654,321+ (give or take a hundred million or so) similar minds each with its own concerns and hopes, I arrived at the following facts in an attempt to find a more credible creed. I now believe that :

- ◆ The Earth is in orbit with a moon, around a star, enabling rare and precious life with water and oxygen, in a cosmos of time and size beyond our experiential understanding.
- ◆ Nature is reactive (Darwin) and not purposive, and tectonic plates and climate have changed, are changing, and after at least five mass extinctions, life has and will change.
- ◆ Humans are only a small part of nature's biological reality and one of many species to be born with gender, then consume, procreate and die after a still increasing, but limited, life span.
- ◆ Vast time enabled life to evolve with an incredibly complex interdependence and humans became dominant as the most communal, interdependent and inventive of all creatures.
- ◆ Animal life evolved to have skills like sensing, flying and swimming but we evolved to have skills



in reasoning, imagination and causing – and a uniquely moral sense of right and wrong.

- ◆ This morality is seen within communities across the world regardless of religion and is passed down generations by genetic nature and social nurture and is vital to all good relations.
- ◆ Above self-centred reason we have love, empathy, compassion, creation, curiosity, aesthetic sense, humour and reciprocal altruism – to express this wonderful spirit and most cultures.
- ◆ God worship can be a vehicle for the spirit but puts ultimate responsibility on a judgmental awareness outside our minds, contrary to a skeptical science based on measurable truths.
- ◆ This spirit (or God) is necessary to social beings and we want to belong to, and label ourselves as from communities of family, location, activity or belief – all of which can cause conflict.
- ◆ A need to resolve conflicts non-violently was partly responsible for us growing from tribes to nations and then forming the United Kingdom, United States, EU and ultimately the UN.
- ◆ The human population on this planet is now over seven times what it was in the early 19th century and is still increasing. Other forms of life have become extinct because of humans.
- ◆ As climate changes and as we compete for reducing resources, conflicts grow, prices rise and inequality increases by putting basic needs (and wants) beyond the reach of more people.

The ever increasing demand for possession and consumption from the growing human population is limited by the finite resources of the planet. This presents us with the ultimate dilemma. We value, celebrate and prolong life but have to plan for a future reduction of the very thing that we value. This problem will not go away by being ignored.

Bob Booth is also a member of Population Matters and the United Nations Association.