

# QAADRANT

Spring 2016

## Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs



### What is it about circles?

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We are grateful to a Friend who drew our attention to this poem by Rumi, the thirteenth century theologian and Sufi poet.

## The Many Wines

*God has given us a dark wine so potent that,  
drinking it, we leave the two worlds.*

*God has put into the form of hashish a power  
to deliver the taster from self-consciousness.*

*God has made sleep so that  
it erases every thought.*

*God made Majnun love Layla so much that  
just her dog would cause confusion in him.*

*There are thousands of wines  
that can take over our minds.*

*Don't think all ecstasies  
are the same!*

*Jesus was lost in his love for God.  
His donkey was drunk with barley.*

*Drink from the presence of saints,  
not from those other jars.*

*Every object, every being,  
is a jar full of delight.*

*Be a connoisseur,  
and taste with caution.*

*Any wine will get you high.  
Judge like a king, and choose the purest,*

*the ones unadulterated with fear,  
or some urgency about what's needed.*

*Drink the wine that moves you  
as a camel moves when it's been untied,  
and is just ambling about.*

(Coleman Barks translation)



## The new psychoactive substances

### Helena Chambers, QAAD's Director, reports

Rumi's poem gets to the heart of the matter, but the manifestations of it get ever more complex. In April the 'Psychoactive Substance Act' will pass into law. The Act creates a blanket ban on the production, distribution, sale and supply of psychoactive substances in the United Kingdom (unless they are on an 'exempt' list).

The Act is a response to the development of substances that have been designed to mimic the effects of illicit drugs, but have been chemically engineered to be different in composition. This has meant that they were not designated as illegal under existing legislation and were sold in 'head shops' or over the internet. Over 100 new drugs were developed in 2014 according to European data, so a piecemeal response to each drug was not adequate. Now any new psychoactive substance will be illegal in terms of production and supply. Generally possession will not be an offence in itself, though possession with intent to supply will be.

These substances can be as, or even more, hazardous than the drugs they mimic in terms of potency and health problems, including the risks of dependency. New Psychoactive Substances (or NPS) were mentioned on the death certificates of 67 people in England and Wales in 2014 figures (though other substances may also have been taken). The fact that they are new and relatively untested is part of their risk.

There has been debate about the unspecific definition of 'psychoactive substances' and also whether some other substances should be included in the 'exempted' category. Review is possible as regards the latter. A particular concern has been how 'synthetic cannabinoids'

have gained a hold in the prison system. A recent report by the Inspector of Prisons states:

*...the availability of new psychoactive substances (NPS), particularly synthetic cannabis known as 'Spice' or 'Mamba', became highly prevalent... NPS have created significant additional harm and are now the most serious threat to the safety and security of the prison system that our inspections identify...<sup>1</sup>*

Frequent ambulance attendances because of acute effects and violence related to drug debts are among the issues mentioned in the report.

The Report proposes a coordinated strategy, including tackling supply and awareness sessions for prisoners and their relatives, as well as psychosocial/medical support. It also proposes that an expert committee chaired by the Prison Minister be set up. When the Act was debated in Parliament, this last proposal was said to be receiving consideration. Staffing levels do seem to be part of the issue, so high-level review would certainly be helpful. RAPT (The Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust) has also drawn attention to this point, as well as the need for more therapeutic drug wings.

A specific measure in the new Act is that possession of NPS by anyone inside a prison will be an offence. Inside prisons and out, though, there is a recognition that considerable effort needs to be put into information and awareness about the risks of NPS. A resource pack for educators is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-psychoactive-substances-nps-resource-pack>.

*1 Changing patterns of substance misuse in adult prisons and service responses HM Inspectorate of Prisons*

# What is it about circles?

## Colin Tickner of Guildford Quaker Meeting reflects

I'm not a fully-fledged Quaker – I'm an Attender – a man who goes along most Sunday mornings to be a small part of a group of people – The Friends – people I respect and admire not only here and now but historically as well. Anyway – on one of those Sunday mornings I 'saw' a hill, I was walking up it towards what became a ring of standing stones. I entered and there in the centre was a bubbling spring of water which later changed into a glowing fire. A bit weird – I don't do visions and spooky things..!

What I saw has stayed with me and led me to think about a few things in a new way – like it all happened in a stone circle and also in real time, it happened within a circle of ordinary men and women – the Friends at the meeting. So that's two circles. Then my thinking spread out – for about 25 years I have been part of a therapeutic circle at treatment centres for people with addictive illnesses. These groups – circles – were life changing for patients and certainly for me. What is it about circles?

Then I wondered about so called primitive cultures – especially in North America – surely they met in circles when they had a decision to make – a pow-wow. Did they know something about the magic of a circle? Is there some

quality generated by people and things in circles? That led me to wondering about Stonehenge – what did those people know? What motivated them to drag monstrous great rocks halfway across England and erect them in a circle in the middle of nowhere? Of course Stonehenge is not alone – on a smaller scale there are many stone circles in the UK – I love Avebury especially.

So – What happens in a Circle? On the face of it the answer seems to be 'very little' – just people sitting in a circle, maybe aware of something happening to them corporately or individually. None of them is specially qualified or significant – just people like me – or us – together in a circle where things can and do happen.

Four words settled in my mind as I thought about this – words to describe the qualities of the kind of circle I'm thinking about – Safe: Supportive: Strong: Sensitive.

Safe means – for me – a confidential place where special things about me can be disclosed – where I can be honest and not be judged or laughed at. And Safe means predictable – a secure, and in many cases Anonymous place, where my inside can show through to my outside.

Supportive means – for me – inclusive. I am gay and my partner and I found at our local meeting that we felt supported and not discriminated against. It means warm and accepting and non-hierarchical.

Supportive means 'in a circle' – not in lines being talked at – dare I say preached to!

Strong means – for me – resilient especially in the face of distress and sometimes disturbing behaviour. When anger or grief or distress are shared the strength of the circle can receive those feelings and 'hold' them. This quality gives courage to the sharer who instinctively knows that 'all will be well and all will be well and all manner of things will be well'.

Sensitive means – for me – that the circle is a listening place and what is more a hearing place. It is gentle and kind – in fact the qualities Paul set out when he wrote to his friends in Corinth almost 2000 years ago. 'Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast etc etc'.

In my experience, these features that I value so highly for myself are the ones that make a treatment centre for addiction work. It becomes a circle, 'holds' the grief and distresses that those in it know from having lived them and enables the growing sense that 'all will be well.'

So circles can be in a treatment centre or a Quaker Meeting or on Salisbury Plain – and once my imagination got going I thought of the Last Supper – Leonardo had the event in a rectangle but maybe it was really a....yes, maybe really a circle! After all most people eat family meals in a circle – perhaps you do, especially at 'special occasions' like a birthday or Christmas? When you have such a meal – or maybe next time you have one take

time to look around you at the faces of those you love tucking into the turkey – ask yourself is it a Safe place? is it Supportive? Strong? and is it Sensitive? It seems very likely that we have in our own homes from time to time a resource which we sometimes hardly realise. What a waste it is to ignore appreciating this wonderful gift, to 'glance at it' as it were and not to value it and trust it further!

I seem to have reached the edge of my Circle thinking – except for one more thought – maybe the most important one – and that is the Circle that is Me! Mine is a three-sided circle made up of Body, Mind and Spirit. I am probably most aware of the Body bit – especially as I get older bits of my body need 'servicing' more frequently! The Mind bit still seems to be functioning – unless you ask me to remember something from yesterday – or the name of someone I meet in the street! The Spirit bit seems to be alive and well – which is unexpected and novel! The question I ask of my three-sided Me circle is: Is it Safe, Supportive, Strong, and Sensitive? Do the three bits of me act in a good way to each other so that health and, if necessary, healing are part of the Circular life of my being?

If you have read as far as this, and you feel like it, why not let your own special experience of these things inform you – and perhaps let us know in a letter to QAADRANT?

## NEWS OF QAAD EVENTS - AND THE 'SSSS'

Friends often seem to bring the 'SSSS' that Colin Tickner describes with them to QAAD gatherings. We have two events to invite you to.

### QAADNET meeting at Bristol Central Meeting House Saturday 23rd April

Last year we held a QAADNET meeting in London which focused on 'close others' – that is, people who are, or have been, affected by the substance problems of someone they love. Those attending valued the opportunity to share their experiences and the various avenues of support and insight that helped them. They suggested that it would be useful to hold further meetings in other parts of the country to make this kind of event as accessible to as many Friends as possible - and this is the first such meeting. Those with personal experience of substance problems or who have a concern through their work or volunteering are also welcome.

### 'Making a Difference' – the QAAD Woodbrooke Conference 29th – 31st July

Faced as we all are with alcohol, gambling and drugs issues, dare we believe we can make a difference - as close others, volunteers, professionals, and above all, as Friends in our Meetings? Join us to share the various ways in which this might be done.

We are delighted that Professor Chris Cook of Durham University has agreed to be our keynote speaker. Chris is a psychiatrist in addiction and an Anglican priest as well as academic. He has been especially influential in helping spirituality to be recognised as a dimension within addiction services. There will also be a choice of workshops on various kinds of action and spirituality, as well as formal and informal opportunities for sharing.

All Friends and attenders are welcome whether you have direct experience or none.

We are grateful that the event has been accepted by Quaker Life as a nominating event, so we hope that Area Meetings will consider nominating a representative.

## LETTERS TO QAADRANT - LETTERS TO QAADRANT

Dear QAAD,

David Barry, in his letter to a recent edition of QAADRANT, indicated that he would be interested to hear from others on the question of decriminalisation. For him, the arguments for decriminalisation are as persuasive as those against.

I offer the following contribution to the debate. Criminalisation of personal use will, on the one hand, adversely affect the life chances of some young people who may for instance wish to enter the legal, justice,

teaching, health or social work professions. There is an equalities issue here - disproportionate numbers of people from minority ethnic communities are criminalised for personal drug use despite the prevalence of drug use being no higher than that of the population at large. Criminalisation of personal use on the other hand is widely thought to have little or no preventive effect – the prevalence of drug use is affected by social and cultural factors rather than legal ones.

*So for me the fundamental question becomes: how can it be right to criminalise the personal use if it damages individuals but has no preventive benefits. .*

*There is no dispute that cannabis use adversely affects the health and wellbeing of some individuals. The ACMD (Advisory Committee on the Misuse of Drugs) has, for almost fifty years, advised governments of the day on drugs issues. It reviewed Cannabis in 2007 when it was asked to comment on the legal classification of cannabis, especially in the light of new and stronger strains of the drug. Their report can be found at*

*[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/119174/acmd-cannabis-report-2008.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/119174/acmd-cannabis-report-2008.pdf)*

*Their conclusions are worth looking at in detail. Their findings include: probable but weak causal links between cannabis use and psychosis; no association between cannabis use and affective disorders such as depression ; no evidence that cannabis acts as gateway drug and, concern about the criminalisation of, especially, young people.*

*Cornwall AM has adopted a Concern about decriminalisation. QAADRANT readers can contact me for further details of this concern and supporting papers (including an evaluation of the Portuguese policy)*

*In friendship and trust,*

*Tony Faragher Wadebridge Quaker Meeting  
tonyfaragher@msn.com*

Another item in QAADRANT prompted the following letter:

*I am indebted to Friends for welcoming me into the Society some four decades ago and this soon led to my joining the committee of the Friends Temperance Union, later to be known as Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs. All this happened at a time when I*

*was seeking people who would treasure my total abstinence instead of merely dismissing me as a killjoy and a miser.*

*I originate from the Hampshire towns, most of which were full of alcoholic drinks bars. Now living in London, I am reliably informed that today there are even more, with a drug culture to boot. Apart from my schoolboy experiments with alcohol and cigarettes, I had remained strictly teetotal, avoiding pubs and clubs where possible. I had also kept away from gambling and getting into debt.*

*Growing up abstaining was not easy, for there were few people to imitate. Even our Eighteen Plus Group met in a pub! And one of my several early jobs was as an office assistant for Southern Ferries where practically everybody disappeared on Fridays for a so-called liquid lunch. I was left to tidy up and to man the telephones.*

*My committee work with Friends gave me some confidence, although I was surprised to learn that not all were fellow teetotalers. Some believed in moderation, although I believe that this has never been a Christian ethic. Would we welcome moderation in, say, swearing, betting or drug-taking? Best to avoid such activities in the first place!*

*I am therefore grateful to those Friends who had recognised and welcomed my non-drinking lifestyle when I was still an impressionable young man. Fortunately also, society has moved on and there are now healthier alternatives for growing youngsters such as sports and leisure centres, rambling groups, adventure holidays and so forth.*

*Antony Porter, Westminster Quaker Meeting.*

The balance between abstinence and moderation has been much considered in Quaker history. QAAD includes both, seeking to encompass the range of perspectives among Friends. We wonder what approaches Friends, and young Friends, have to this subject now?



## QAADNET Meeting

Saturday 23rd April 2016  
11.30 a.m. start (coffee from 11)  
Finish 3.30 p.m

### Subject: 'Close others'

Venue: Bristol Central Friends Meeting House, Champion Square, Bristol BS2 9DB

Please contact Helena Chambers for further details and also to register attendance. All Friends and attenders are welcome, but it is helpful if we can plan for numbers

The new QAAD website is now 'live'

[www.qaad.org](http://www.qaad.org)

Please visit it for information about QAAD, news of events, briefings and details of our public issues work on alcohol, drugs and gambling.

## A date for your diary?

The QAAD/Woodbrooke conference 2016

**Dates: 29th – 31st July 2016**

**Theme: Making A Difference**

What can help reduce the problems of substances and gambling? It may be a practical action - or simply a word, a look, or an upholding.

Join us as we consider the ways in which we can make a difference.

We look forward to welcoming old Friends and new.

All Friends and attenders welcome.

The conference is a Nominating event.

Letters and articles for QAADRANT are very welcome, and should be sent to Helena Chambers, 21 Church Street, Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire GL20 5PD. t: 01684 299247 e: [helenaqaad@hotmail.com](mailto:helenaqaad@hotmail.com)