

Report from Dr Pak and Dr Moon's visit to Birmingham, UK. March 31st - April 2nd.

We had the pleasure of True Mother's special emissaries visiting us in Birmingham recently, and the first challenge was to find suitable accommodation for them. We looked at local bed and breakfast places close to our home, but finally decided to enquire at the hotel where True Mother had stayed when she spoke here in May 2000, which seems like a lifetime ago. We booked Dr Pak and his wife in for 2 nights there, at the Strathallen (pictured) and, just as we were about to pay, Patricia noticed an advertisement come up on the screen behind the front desk, with a special offer on. She asked the receptionist about it, and he told us that if we were certain of the booking he could offer us a much reduced price. He also then mentioned that they could both have their first evening meal as complimentary, up to the value of £23 each, so we actually got an amazing deal in the end. It seemed very meaningful to use that hotel again, and it certainly brought back many vivid memories for us.



The uniquely shaped Strathallen Hotel



The Aer Lingus flight from Dublin

David was a bit late driving to meet our special couple who were coming from Dublin, approaching Birmingham airport in the car around the time when their flight was due to land. And, lo and behold, the Aer Lingus flight from Dublin went right over the top of his car on the approach road. It was a nice feeling to welcome Dr Pak and Dr Moon, representing True Mother, and we would have to say the whole time they were with us was delightful, very relaxed but deeply meaningful for all of us as well. Our sharing was so natural. We were able to receive a lot, but our special emissaries were also very open to learn about our work, our approach to witnessing and outreach, and equally to learn from the Ambassadors for Peace to whom we could introduce them.



In the home of Dr Jagjit Taunque and his wife Satinder.



Both couples are 'Special Emissaries'!

Friday April 1st was an action-packed day, quite tiring for our guests as we tried to fit in 3 visits, in addition to the evening programme with our members. We began by visiting Dr Jagjit Taunque (MBE), and his wife Satinder (OBE), Her Majesty the Queen's 'special emissaries' in the West Midlands. Together with several other people, they have the title Deputy Lieutenant and are invited to all kinds of important social functions where they represent the Queen. It seemed very fitting somehow that True Mother's special emissaries should meet the Queen's special emissaries! Dr and Mrs Taunque played a role in the struggle to have True Parents allowed into the UK in 2005, getting a letter from FFWPU delivered to the (then) Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, via their Member of Parliament. Jagjit subsequently managed to get a personal photo with True Father in Geneva, thanks to Margaret Ali, and has always carried that picture in his pocket to this day! There was a very fruitful exchange between everyone, and Dr Moon gave a generous gift of ginseng to Satinder, who is recovering from a broken knee-cap after a serious fall.



In the home of former Lord Mayor, Cllr Mahmood Hussain.



The main Sikh gurdwara on Birmingham's Soho Road

Our next visit was to the home of the first Muslim Lord Mayor of Birmingham, senior Councillor Mahmood Hussain. Cllr Hussain has been a Muslim pioneer of interfaith relations in Birmingham, and has always supported our interfaith events and public activities, including the Interfaith Peace Blessing on several occasions. When Rev Song came up to Birmingham in 2010, he warmly welcomed him to our city, and he did the same again for Dr Pak and Dr Moon, sharing stories with them about his visit to an ILC in Korea a number of years ago. More food and refreshments were served, including home-made somosas and spiced Indian tea. It's such a nice feeling to be able to meet in a very relaxed manner, in the homes of our public officials.



Our third and final visit was to the main Sikh gurudwara in a part of Birmingham called 'Little India'. This gurudwara, with a recently added Civic Centre which serves the whole of the local community, covers an area of approximately 25,000 square metres, and is 4 stories high. The spiritual leader of this temple and Sikh community, Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh, is a visionary of both Sikhism and global interfaith activities. An extremely busy person, he was away in New York on this occasion but requested his second-in-command, Sukhbir Singh, to host our emissaries at the gurudwara. This was very appropriate as Sukhbir, like Jagjit and Satinder Taunque, had attended the Blessing in Korea some years earlier in 2010. Bhai Sahib's parking space had been reserved for us when we arrived, and head scarves were provided as we entered the temple. After removing our shoes, we entered the main worship hall (darbar sahib) to pay our respects where the Guru Granth Sahib, the Holy Book of Sikhism, was being read. We spent a few moments in prayer, received the prashad (holy food) offered to all who enter, and then went upstairs to visit one of the modern wonders of religious architecture.

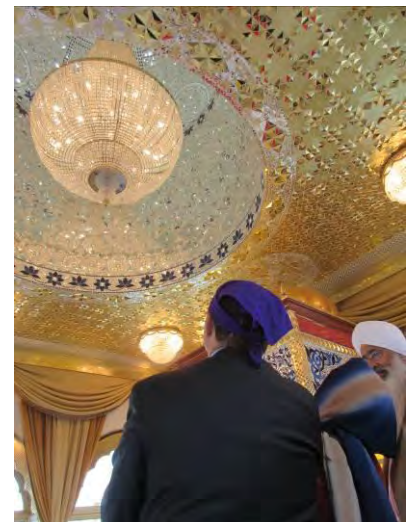


Entering the dome on top of the gurudwara.



Inside the 'holy of holies'.

The main dome on top of the gurudwara is rather like the 'holy of holies', where the Guru Granth Sahib is read continuously, and prayers offered for the whole world. The ceiling of this place, and the interior of the dome is a breathtaking sight to behold. It comprises around 120,000 pieces of cut glass, stunning in colour, beauty and form, but perhaps the most remarkable fact is that it was created and 'built' by a Muslim artisan, a specialist in cut glass. Given the fractured history between Sikhs and Muslims, this is absolutely amazing.



We came down from the dome to the main office and, while enjoying further hospitality, Sukhbir listened attentively to Dr Pak followed by Sukhbir explaining to Dr Pak and Dr Moon about his personal spirituality as a Sikh, including the fact that he tries his best to incline his heart and mind towards God twenty four hours a day. It was again a very productive meeting from both sides, and we left with quite a deep feeling of connectedness to one another.

Finally, on the Friday evening, our members gathered together to hear first of all Dr Moon speak about different aspects of her life of faith and personal journey, including numerous people she had met all over the world, and then Dr Pak reading from a prepared speech with a number of extemporaneous comments along the way. We had hesitated to invite our very new members, wondering if the content would be appropriate for them, but felt that it would be good for them to connect to the roots of our movement in Korea, and to Drs Pak and Moon personally as elders from those earliest times. In the end, twenty or so of our newer members came, and all seemed to have a really good experience when we spoke to them afterwards.



Meeting with our local community.



Taking a photograph with four of our newer members.

All in all, we could achieve quite a lot during a relatively short time, and we said goodbye to our emissaries with a happy heart the next morning, as they continued on their journey around the UK, flying north to their next stop in Edinburgh.



True Mother speaking in Birmingham. May 2000.



Presenting Ambassador for Peace awards.