

# Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

Issue 25

March 2009



Children

## Belonging and joining

## Part 1

This children's work edition of "Journeys in the Spirit" comes out monthly. It offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with children aged 4 –12 years in a Quaker setting. It is offered with the intention of providing an opportunity for exploring, creating and learning in an atmosphere of worship in partnership on our shared journey in the spirit.

Included are sections on: **getting ready**, for those co-ordinating the programme; **gather**, meeting, centering, focusing; **engage**, beginning to think about the theme; **respond**, activities linked to the theme; **reflect**, ending appropriately; and **review**, evaluating what has happened. To offer a balanced session you should aim to do something from each section. Some of the activities are included on additional sheets. Timings or ages are not stated, as this will depend on the group and how the guidance and activities are used.

Underpinning each issue is the idea that there are four directions to our spiritual journey. **Inwards** to ourselves; **outwards** to others; **upwards** towards God, the deeper mystery; **downwards** to the world we live in.



**The seventeenth in the series exploring Quakers: a people of God: being and doing**

## Getting ready

In this, and the next issue, we offer ways to enable children, and adults, to explore and express belonging and joining. How are we, of any age, part of a people of God? What does that mean for what we actually do?

These are issues at the heart of children being in the Society of Friends, in Meeting – how they see it, feel it and own it. It is about participation – participation as a way that belonging can be facilitated and expressed. It is about membership - membership as a way of expressing belonging and a desire to be part of and give to Quakers. And, it is also about some fundamentals of the Quaker way.

There is that of God in each of us - it is in me – it is in you. Yet, also, I am in it and we are in it together. It is a place where we belong, that also belongs in us – a bit like air; all around us and in us at the same time. This is true for children or adults – it is just that the ways each of us have or express our experience may vary. We hope you enjoy the range of thoughts, processes and activities we have devised.

It is important to remember that there are still objections in some Meetings to the very idea of children's meeting and the notion of children being on a spiritual journey is alien - belonging is difficult and joining impossible. Equipping children, and adults who work with them, to consider and verbalise thoughts and feelings about belonging and joining is an ongoing issue in most churches. It is about the continued assertion of the inclusion of all in the building of the kingdom of heaven on earth and doing so with love and tenderness.

## Underpinning references

'Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.'

**Elders at Balby, 1656 – in the Introduction to Quaker Faith and Practice.**

*(This, and quotes on page 3, were in the first of this series, Journeys in the Spirit 9, – they are included again to link back to that issue)*

# Gather

Invite the children to sit in a circle. Explain that today's meeting will be about 'belonging' - the important feeling that we have when we feel 'at home' with a person or in a group or place. When we feel that we belong, we may feel happier and more confident to really be ourselves. Jesus said to his disciples (his closest friends) 'Make your home in me, as I make my home in you'. You could ask the children to reflect quietly about whether there is someone who might say that to them, or that they might want to say it to. Do they ever feel they can have that sense of belonging with God, or Jesus? See *Sheet 25.A Resources: You will need 2 or 3 balls of wool (any colours but avoid very 'hairy' wool)*.

# Engage

**Three ways are offered to engage with the belonging aspect of this theme. They are suitable, with adjustments, for all ages – child and adult.**

## 1 The story of the beautiful city.

This is a story that began life with the writer dreaming, thinking and talking about the church that she grew up in. It became a story about leaving one place of worship, living and believing and travelling in the 'desert' and finding another 'home' – in between the beautiful city and the desert.

Depending on the ages in your children's meeting you could read the story in one go or over two sessions. Read it yourself first and then decide. It is a tale to be read slowly and with care. See *Sheet 25.C*.

## 2. My own space.

Begin by inviting the children to think about their bedroom. You could ask how many people in the group have a room of their own or share with someone.

- Explain that we all need our own space - even if we share our room with someone else, there's usually a corner of it that feels especially ours, even if it's just our bed!

- Ask 'How would someone coming in to the room know that it was your space?' ....'What makes it different from your sister / brother / friend's room? Invite the children to close their eyes and picture their bedroom in their mind. Invite them to picture things like their stuff, posters, clothes, how it's decorated, special furniture or bedding, washing up lying around, half made models or projects etc... Then get the children to open their eyes and share two or three things each that makes their space 'theirs'.

- Invite the children to look around the 'Quaker' space they are in now. Does this place show that this is 'our space'? How? What things make us feel more at home here?

## 3. Hermit crabs find a home.

Begin by asking if anyone has been on holiday to the seaside & gone rock-pooling. What creatures have the children seen in rock-pools? Has anyone ever seen a hermit crab? Can they say what it's like?

- Read all or a section of the information sheet on hermit crabs See *Sheet 25.A* (or use a good quality children's information book).

- Start a conversation with "I wonder why hermit crabs feel so at home in snail shells?" and follow up with "I wonder what sort of shell you would like to have if you were a hermit crab?"



## References

"When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth" -

Boy aged 4 in response to a question, 'What does love mean?' asked of children aged 4 to 8 by Out North West a gay magazine for young people.



"Dwell in me, as I dwell in you."

**The Bible: John 15:3**

"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. "

**The Bible: Isaiah Ch.11 vs. 6 - 9**



'We have wondered whether there is anything Quakers today can say as one. After much struggle we have discovered that we can proclaim this: there is a living God at the centre of all, who is available to each of us as a present teacher at the very heart of our lives. We seek as people of God to be... prophets of joy who know from experience and can testify to the world, as George Fox did, 'that the Lord is at work in this thick night'. **Young Friends from 35 countries 1985 North Carolina**

"..the Religious Society of Friends is a people raised up to bear witness to the universality of the divine light in all, and the priority of the spirit and the truth as the basis of religion over forms, hierarchies and doctrines". He also suggests that "A people of God is different from a society, a community, a family, a movement or a revival although they might all describe aspects of what we do, wait in."

**Chuck Fager, in presentations to Canadian Yearly Meeting 1997,**

# Respond

## 1. The story of the beautiful city.

Follow the story reading with some wondering questions:

I wonder which part of this story you like the best?

I wonder which part of this story you think is most important?

I wonder which part of this story is in you or you are in?

I wonder if there is any part of this story that you could leave out and still have all the story that you need?

When you judge that everybody who wants to speak has spoken say that there is now time to use any of the creative and arts materials laid out around the room to make something to do with the story. Include simple writing materials as well.

*Resources: Newspaper, cardboard boxes, coloured magazines masking tape, scissors, a tray of sand, PVA glue, glue sticks, paints, brushes, coloured tissue, pencils, pens, white paper of different sizes, coloured paper and card, oil pastels, wax crayons, paper doilies, pipe cleaners and anything else you can think of. Always use good quality materials.*

## 2. My own space.

Ask the children for suggestions for ways to make this Quaker place feel more like *their* space, like they belonged there. These ideas might include things like: changing the space in some ways; putting up pictures or a mural; making an 'About Us' book or poster. How could you make spaces for quiet, for creative stuff, for reading, for thinking about the world, for worship as a whole group?

Spend some time talking about the children's suggestions. Invite the children to consider which ideas feel like the best ones to put into action now. Remind the children that the Quaker way of decision making involves trying to feel what is right for the group, even if it's not necessarily what we suggested ourselves!

When you have settled on one or more ideas for making this space more a place of belonging for the children, you can make a start on putting them into action.

Alternatively, have an array of resources as outlined above but add a selection of shoe and other boxes and say that people can make a box that shows what their 'own space' is like or what they might want to have in a space if they could make one up all of their own.

## 3. Hermit crabs find a home.

Invite children to draw/colour a shell that could be theirs if they were a hermit crab - it is their place of belonging, where they feel safe and at home. They may like to use one of the provided templates on *Sheet 25.B*.

Talk about how we may have many different places (or times) that we belong, or feel at home. Encourage the children to give suggestions eg. at our house, at dad's or mum's house, at scouts, with our best friends, when our cat is snuggled up on our lap, at Quakers, under a favourite tree, at a favourite holiday place, at gran's, when we're with our football team.

Suggest that the children can reflect all the different places that they belong when they design their shell, by using different colours or patterns for different 'belonging' places.

*Resources: Beautiful colouring and drawing things, paper and card*



# Reflect

Share the plans and beginnings you have made. Review what else needs doing. How do we feel now? Share excitement & any uncertainties. Ask for one or more people to share the children's ideas and plans with adults in meeting.

Share the shells that have been designed. Children may wish to explain what the different colours or patterns represent (but some may prefer not to share this).

# Review

The review can happen at the time or later – it maybe by yourself or with others. Some useful questions for the use of volunteers to look back over and learn from the session include:

Have children been able to participate in their own way? What went well and why? Has each child been able to reflect, even a little, on something about her or his thoughts and feelings about God, the Divine, the big questions? What is there for you to learn from this session? What might you do differently another time?

## Topical activity      Good news about our planet



It is easy for people of any age to feel despair about the damage being done to our beautiful planet and the creatures that we share it with. Despair can lead to a feeling that there is nothing anybody can do to make a difference or change what is happening. Good news is important. Just today, February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009, there was news that the numbers of Albatross being accidentally killed by fisherman in South Africa has gone down by 86%. People who know all about birds have been helping fishermen be more careful with hooks and nets.

In our country the beautiful Red Kite, which nearly vanished because of the use of poisonous chemicals has been reintroduced to different parts of the country and is doing really well. It is so lovely to see it swooping and gliding over wood and fields. Share these stories and others that you can find. Look at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds web pages – see below for the web address. What could children's meeting do? Does the Meeting have a garden that could be used or changed in anyway? Are there conservation projects that could be helped?



## Links to other organisations and resources

[www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp) and click on the Ideas Store.

[www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp) - the Quaker Life Resources Room can be found via this link - phone and email for resources on the contact details below.

[www.rspb.org.uk/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/) - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

This issue was written by Ginny Wall and edited by Chris Nickolay who also wrote the topical activity.

The next children's issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* looks at belonging and joining once more and will be available from April 1<sup>st</sup>. This is followed on May 1<sup>st</sup> by the first of the new series – Our Quaker Stories.

**Ways for all ages to connect with each other around the theme of belonging include:**

Reading the story of the beautiful city in a shared meeting for worship and having all the craft activities available for everyone.

Talking about hermit crabs and getting everyone to design their own shell and describe it to at least one other person in a quiet worship sharing time.

Involving older Friends in helping to change the children's meeting space.

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# Journeys in the Spirit



## Children

### Sheets 25.A

### Gather



Explain that we're going to make a web of belonging, by joining ourselves up with wool! We'll say our names and then those of other people in our meeting as we pass the wool around. As we say each name, we'll just take a moment of silence before passing the wool on again, so that we can think about the person and our connection to them. When everyone has settled into silence, begin by saying your name and holding onto the loose end of a ball of wool, then pass or gently throw the ball to someone on the other side of the circle...they then hold the wool where it has reached them, say their name, pause, and pass or throw the ball on to another person in the circle. This action is then repeated until everyone in the circle has had the chance to say their name – a small web should be woven between you, joining you up.

If there is time, then go on to invite each person to pass the ball of wool again, but now you say the name of someone else in your meeting when the ball reaches you – this way you hold other members of meeting in the light, making them part of the web of belonging. If children can't think of another name, they can ask for help, or just say the name of family or other friends. And so, the web of belonging can grow and grow. Just start a new ball of wool when you run out!

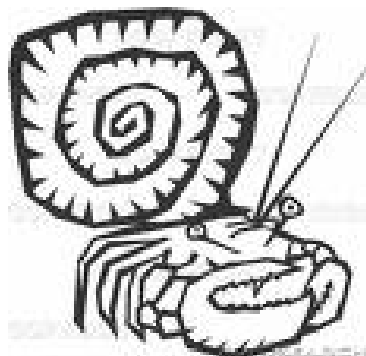
Take a moment at the end of this activity to look at the beautiful, colourful web of belonging that you have made...and hold all those people, including yourselves, in the light...before clearing up and moving on.

## Engage

## Hermit crabs find a home

### Hermit crabs – some facts:

- Hermit crabs are members of the crustacean family (crusty-shelled animals living in the sea). They are often seen in a tidal area ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intertidal\\_zone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intertidal_zone)) of a beach uncovered at low tide, for example in rock pools ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tide\\_pool](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tide_pool)) – you may well have seen a 'common hermit crab' if you have gone rock-pooling on holiday. If you are really lucky, you might have seen a hermit crab change shells...
- Hermit crabs are not true crabs and do not have a completely hard shell of their own. Because their body is quite soft, they have to protect themselves by finding an empty shell that used to belong to another sea creature to live in. They can retract their whole body into the shell if they are in danger. They particularly like the shells of sea snails, but will often use the shells of dog-whelks, periwinkles and other molluscs. Hermit crabs are very quarrelsome amongst themselves over the availability of snail shells!
- As they grow, hermit crabs have to find a larger empty shell to live in. (They also shed the armoured covering of their claws and front of their body in order to grow; a new larger hard covering grows underneath, then become hard when the old one is shed.)When they find a shell they wait next to it, checking, then rush quickly between their old home and their new.
- Some hermit crabs that live in the sea, regularly give a lift to sea anemones and other animals on their shells. Sometimes a rag worm will live inside the snail shell with the hermit crab, and eat the hermit crab's leftovers! Hermit crabs have a varied diet. They often scavenge around for rotting food, both in the sea and on land.



# Journeys in the Spirit

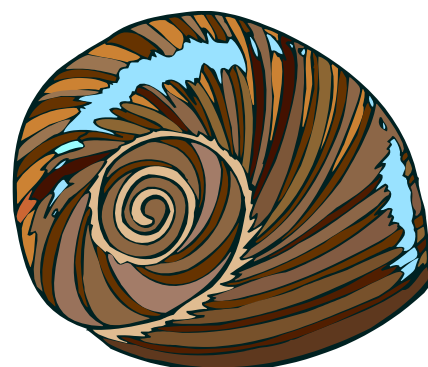
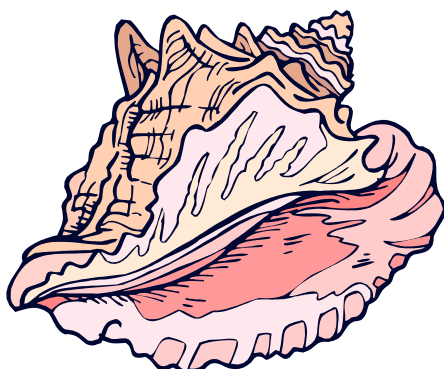
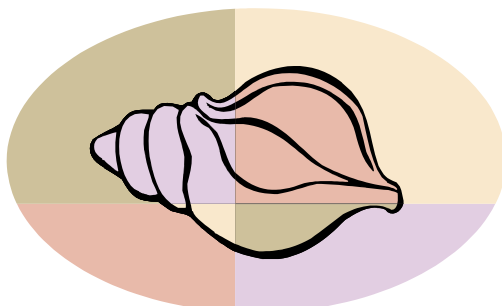
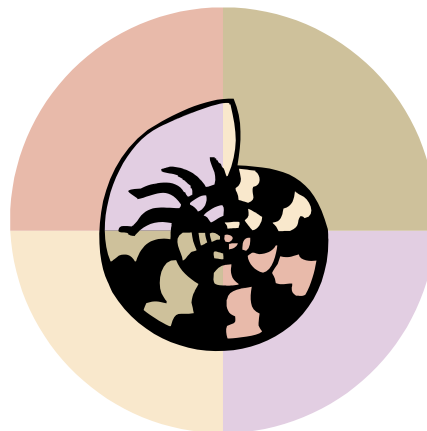
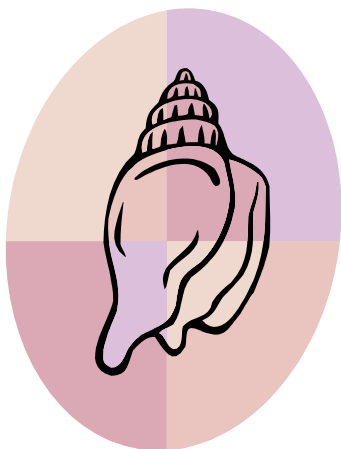
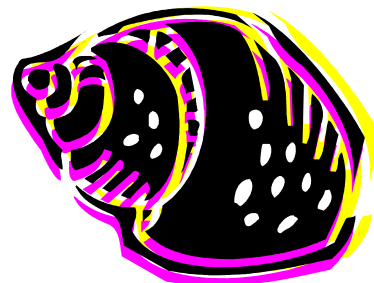
Children



Sheet 25.B

Respond

Hermit crabs find a home



# Journeys in the Spirit



## Children

### Sheet 25.C Engage The story of the beautiful city

There was once a beautiful city that stood near the edge of a huge desert; the people who lived there and desert travellers just knew it as 'The City'. It was an ancient place, filled with graceful buildings with sloping roofs and carved wooden doorways leading into airy courtyards. Tall towers covered in shining metal shone and sparkled in the midday sun, so that travellers could see The City from far off across the desert.

In this city, in an elegant old building with high ceilings lived a young girl, her beloved father and two younger brothers (her mother had died when the girl was very young).

As the girl was growing up, she loved to walk through the streets and courtyards of The City, greeting friends and passers-by with a smile or a wave. She would slip into buildings like the Government Palace or the City Temple and spend hours staring up at the great curving ceilings, painted a deep dark-blue with bright gold stars, for which The City was famous. As the girl gazed at these painted domes, she would long to know what it was like to look up at the real night sky over the desert. City dwellers were not supposed to leave The City at night, as it was considered very dangerous in the desert, especially at night: you could be eaten by wild animals or simply get lost and die of thirst in the wilderness.

There were a lot of rules like this in The City. They were designed to keep you safe from harm. You weren't allowed to read certain books in case they frightened you. You had to stay indoors when dust storms blew in from the desert. And, most puzzling of all to the girl, only men, not women, could make the laws, sit on The City's Ruling Council or lead the prayers in the Temple. The girl knew plenty of women who were just as kind and wise as the men of The City, so she couldn't really work out why this rule had been made. It just seemed to have always been that way.

As the time approached when she would be considered a grown woman and ready to marry, the girl found she couldn't wait any longer to see the world outside the City. She wanted to find out what the desert was like, whether the night sky over the desert was as beautiful as the ceilings of the city palaces, and whether there were any other cities out there. The girl wanted to find out more about the world before she became a woman.

So, one day, before anyone else in the house was up, the girl packed a small bag with water and food, left a note for her father, walked out of the city gates and headed for the desert.

The day wore on and the girl kept walking in the heat of the sun. She saw no people - only a few small desert animals hiding among the rocks along the path. The girl was young and strong, so this walk into the desert was not hard for her and she enjoyed the freedom and excitement of her adventure. She sang songs that she had learned as a little girl and watched huge birds flying high overhead in the middle of the day.

As night fell, the desert became a lot cooler, and the girl was glad of the shawl she had packed in her bag. She was tired, so she curled up next to a large rock and drifted off to sleep, only to wake with a start a short while later when she heard the distant sound of people talking and animals bleating. She peeped over the top of the rock that had provided her with shelter, and, to her amazement, saw a large group of people gathering around a fire in the distance. These must be the desert people she had heard tell of so often in The City. Her curiosity was stronger than her fear, and she was beginning to feel very cold, so the girl made her way towards the little crowd around the fire: as she got closer, she saw that the people were making camp for the night and penning up a small flock of goats with woven brushwood fences.

When a group of the desert people noticed the girl, they came and greeted her in a very friendly way. Their language was not unlike the language of The City, but with a very different accent, so it wasn't too hard for the girl and her new friends to communicate if they listened carefully to one another. The desert people invited the girl to share their food, and offered her a place to sleep. Before long, she was telling them all about The City and her longing for adventure. She learned that the desert people had some farmland at the edge of the desert, but that they wandered the desert for much of the year, making camp whenever they were close to an underground water source: they seemed to know about lots of these desert springs. The people invited the girl to travel with them for a little while, so that she could see the desert and gaze at the stars above it at night.

And so the girl came to travel with the desert people for many months. She learned their ways, and took her turn cooking food, putting up tents and looking after the goats. She loved the way the desert people all took turns to lead their tribe on its travels, men and women alike, and that they often welcomed wanderers like her. She came to love lying on her back at night, close to the dying fire, and watching the dark sky overhead fill with stars. It reminded her of the ceilings of The City, and she would think of her father and brothers, sending them a blessing on the night breeze.

As she travelled with the desert people, the girl discovered that there were other cities and towns near the desert; she even visited some of them and helped her friends trade goats and grain for other food or tools. These places sometimes reminded her of The City that she had grown up in, but each had its own beauty, whether it was the spectacular gardens and fountains of one, or the people's love of dancing and colourful costumes in another. In several of these cities, both women and men ruled and led the sacred ceremonies. The girl wondered if she could go and live in one of these cities when she grew up, but she didn't



really know anyone there; her heart sometimes longed for the beautiful city she had called home for so long, and the friends and family she had left behind.

Eventually these longings became stronger, and the girl began to weary of the endless travelling and putting up camp. She had come to love the desert people, but she knew their way of life was not for her forever. So one morning, she packed her bag again and said goodbye to her desert friends, promising that she would come and travel with them again very soon.

The girl walked for many days to get back to The City, eating food that the desert people had given her for the journey, and drinking water at the springs that she now knew how to find. Her friends had given her many gifts on parting, and she carried her favourite in her hand as she walked: a tiny telescope that would fit into her pocket, so that she could look at the stars from any city roof or tower at night.

Eventually the girl spied the towers of The City shining in the sunlight a long way off. She was approaching from a direction she had never explored before, where huge rock cliffs lined the path. As she came round a corner, the girl noticed a small house standing by itself; it must have been about half a day's walk from The City. Outside the house was an old woman with long white hair tied back in an untidy plait; she wore a dark red dress and sturdy boots. The woman was leading some woolly little goats into an enclosure by the house and throwing grain from her pocket to some wild birds who had flown down to sit on the fence.

When the old woman saw the girl, she waved in greeting. She watched as the girl approached, seeming in no hurry to go back indoors, but just smiled at her visitor as if she had been expecting her all along.

The old woman greeted the girl warmly and invited her inside for a drink and a rest. It felt very peaceful in the old woman's little house, and the girl found herself telling her all about The City and her travels with the desert people. She explained about her need to explore the world a little, about how lovely The City was, but how she did not always feel she belonged there, yet she did not want to wander always like the desert people. The old woman then told the girl how she herself had once lived in a beautiful city, but felt a similar longing. She had followed that longing into the desert, where she had eventually come upon this little house, abandoned for many years, and had decided to live here, with the goats and birds for company. The woman invited the girl to stay with her for a while and see how she liked the life there on the edge of the desert, within sight of the gleaming roofs and towers of her childhood home.

Over the weeks and months that followed, the girl found that she loved the life here at the desert's edge. She would get up early to look after the animals and fill the water jugs from a spring nearby, then she and the old woman would spend the day working in the house, walking in the desert, digging the little vegetable garden or making colourful goats' wool weavings that the woman would take to The City to sell.

Sometimes people from The City came to visit; they would sit with the wise old woman and ask her advice, or learn the chants that she sang. Sometimes they just came to walk in the desert with her in silence, and go home refreshed. She would always greet them with a kind smile and listen to them as if it was the most important thing in the world that she could do.

Whatever they were doing, the wise woman taught the girl to turn her heart always to the Spirit of Love that she said was at the heart of all the religions of the cities and the desert; sometimes they would sit in silence as they worked, and sometimes they sang prayers and chants together. The girl felt like her heart had found a kind of peace, and she wondered if she could stay there forever.

The next time the woman went to The City to sell her weavings, the girl went with her, and so she was able to see her father and brothers and tell them all about her adventures. She told them that she was very happy living with the wise woman in the little house by the rocks, and invited them to visit her there.

Months passed, and one day the girl asked the wise woman if she could stay with her for good, as she had grown to love that place at the desert's edge, and had come to feel that maybe it was where she belonged. The wise old woman replied that the girl could stay as long as she liked. She said that the whole world and stars lay within the girl's heart, so she belonged anywhere that her heart could be happy. Then the wise old woman went to her little shelf and took a card with some words written on it out of an old book; she gave it to the girl and told her that the words were from an ancient holy book and that they explained better than she could do what it means to belong in this world.

The card said:

**NOW IN THIS CITY...  
THERE IS A DWELLING PLACE,  
A TINY LOTUS FLOWER,  
WITHIN IT A TINY SPACE.  
SEEK WHAT IS  
WITHIN IT...  
AS WIDE AS THAT  
SPACE OUTSIDE IS THE  
SPACE WITHIN  
THE HEART.  
WITHIN IT LIE  
HEAVEN AND EARTH  
FIRE AND WIND,  
SUN AND MOON,  
LIGHTNING  
AND THE STARS,  
EVERYTHING...**

...and the girl understood that both the starry ceilings of The City and the night skies over the desert would always be in her heart, wherever she went in the world.