

# **Report of the Beshara Trust Open Meeting**

**Friends House, London**

**8<sup>th</sup> August 2015.**

This report combines points from letters received by the Trust prior to the meeting and comments made during the meeting. It is not exhaustive but reflects the wide diversity of opinions expressed concerning recent developments in an open discussion.

The Open Meeting was chaired and introduced by Martin Lam who explained that a meeting with the Board of the Chisholme Institute had been scheduled for September when it would be possible to seek clarification on any questions that remained unclear and also put to the Directors the views and feelings expressed to the Trustees. He described this as just the beginnings of an ongoing conversation where views can be aired and developed and in which everyone can participate.

Elizabeth Roberts then gave a report that summarised the key points from the letters received

## **1. Key points from letters sent to the Beshara Trust**

When announcing the AGM & Open meeting in London, the Beshara Trust also invited contribution of ideas, suggestions or requests from those unable to attend, with the promise that they would be included. This is a summary of some of the key points submitted in response to Hakim's recent letter.

- **Underlying concern**

Underlying the responses received was a concern or question about the relationship of the name Beshara to its meaning. Is it possible to keep the meaning and remove or change the name, in the sense that 'a rose by any other name would smell as sweet'?

Or is it rather that the intimate good news and beneficence of Beshara is carried in the name, like the scent in the rose? If the name is removed from the courses at Chisholme, will the "taste" be reduced as well? Will it lose something of himma and blessing?

Or perhaps this is not what is at stake at all and the Beshara courses will remain at the heart of the Chisholme programme but within a wider offering of events publicised under the Chisholme Institute. In which case the change is more like adding another door to make the invitation even larger.

These are questions that arise from the uncertainty of how far the non use of the name Beshara will extend.

- **Public announcement**

A suggestion has been made that the Trust send out an email re-stating its role and responsibilities and operating principles, in particular its commitment to the principle of "consult among ourselves".

The Trust is urged to make a public announcement clearly stating its intention to affirm the name Beshara and its meaning through continuing to set up events under its umbrella. Many people are upset or confused by the Institute's decision and its implications. It's important that the Beshara Trust should take a leadership role in coming up with a clear way forward.

- **Relation of the Trust to the Beshara School and its courses**

Several people have quoted from Bulent's paper 'The Running of Chisholme'

"The function of all the staff is under the surveyance, direction and control of the Principal, who is solely responsible for the running of the Chisholme School, and to the Board of Directors, which controls Chisholme Institute for the purpose of running courses for the Beshara Trust " ....

"But the main purpose for the Institute is to run courses for the Beshara Trust in as many ways as the Trustees and the Directors together see necessary and fit."

Attention was drawn in the last sentence to the small word 'together' - that two **together** are clearly better than two apart. Whilst each is a legally independent entity with its own remit, the two bodies are so obviously created to serve the same purpose, that is not right that they should divide apart.

Bulent's concern in writing this paper was that the whole arrangement moves as 'one autonomous body' and 'people are not deluded into seeing two'.

- **Confusion over reasons behind the name change**

Some have questioned whether the name the Beshara School is really 'arcane and mystifying' and 'unnecessarily complex for someone wanting to know specifically about Chisholme' or whether it actually enhances the clarification of Chisholme's purpose?

Others pointed out that dropping the name isn't an effective strategy to address the problems identified in the letter. Even if we have created an orthodoxy or allowed limiting beliefs to be built up around the name over time (a human weakness that nobody would claim to be free from) then surely what we have to do is recognise this and then refrain from it. Simply changing the name does not address the tendency to limiting beliefs. Why not disassociate from the beliefs and keep the name?

- **Some suggestions regarding next steps**

Some people feel so disenfranchised by the way this decision has been taken, with seemingly no regard for those who have loved and financially supported Chisholme for many years because it is the home of the Beshara school, that they feel legal action should be investigated.

The trustees have been reminded that the Beshara Trust is the body specifically to care for the name Beshara. It is important that collectively the Beshara School is not allowed to drift aimlessly. The Trustees have it in their gift, if they so wish, to take it back. If there is no longer place for it at Chisholme , then other means of propagating knowledge be sought. What must not be cast away is the name Beshara.

Others consider that the real problem is the way in which the increasingly varied spectrum of personal belief systems and interpretations have adversely affected how we all understand and relate to each other.

The solution is that we should now all make an effort to work together - Directors, Trustees, all who hold Beshara dear - in a much more open and inclusive way.

## **2. Open Discussion**

### **Working together**

The Open meeting discussion began with a focus on the relationship between the Beshara Trust (BT) the Board of the Chisholme Institute (CI) with the question of why the two organisations haven't been working together, as it is so clearly important that they should do.

A previous Trustee explained that after the sale of Frilford and the financial disaster the BT spent many years trying to ask itself what its role should be but had never come to a real answer, nor did it feel it had a role in trying to guide the Beshara School, although it was aware of Bulent's paper on the running of Chisholme. So at that time there was no question of a division between the two charities. It was after the movement to renew the Beshara Trust that differences began to emerge.

The view was expressed that in recent years there has been no real relationship and that the only relationship allowed to the BT has been through financial support of CI.

However there was recognition amongst both bodies that this needs to change. A recent meeting of BT and CI was very productive. CI tried to arrange meeting with BT before sending out letter but this not possible to arrange. The suggestion was made that this discussion at the Open meeting was in a way premature before consultation between BT and CI has happened. The Chair assured the meeting that the BT will not rest until the Trust receives answers to questions and achieves agreement with the directors. The Trust takes its responsibilities very seriously, and its position is that the Trustees want to work in active full accord with the Directors.

There followed a discussion about sense in which, on the one hand, the two bodies are independent, each having their own remit for which they must be allowed to take full responsibility, and, on the other, they clearly have the same aim, as a reading of their respective founding documents shows, and should be collaborating under the broader umbrella of what they serve in common.

### **Questions about the dropping of the name Beshara from the publicity of CI**

This was the subject of much lively discussion. Questions included why was this major change not a consensus decision made consequent to a much wider consultation? How did it occur? Why were some people 'happy and relieved' at the change? And how could the name Beshara possibly be considered an impediment to the Beshara School?

It was explained that the idea arose from a discussion with the Principal about the problems he had experienced and could foresee in publicising Chisholme. Many people, about 80% of responses to the Principal's letter, were overwhelmingly positive, although many long and cogent arguments had been received from those who could not understand the reasons given for the change.

Some were willing to accept it based on their experience that on all visits to Chisholme on courses over the years, they had found nothing but good. They did not doubt the integrity and good intention of the decision and trusted that what happens there is in the spirit of the education.

Others were initially concerned by the change but subsequently found it freeing as it enabled them to recognise it was a label they had subtly identified with.

Another explanation for not using the name, at least for a while, was that it was being used in a fixed sense that stifled the possibility of experimentation and innovation in the way the education might be delivered or spoken about, whereas what mattered was how people experience the education, not what name it is described by. The education could continue in the spirit of Beshara but under the title the Chisholme Institute which would be a stronger name, indicating a strong research base, and facilitating applications for external funding.

Others applauded the desire for experimentation and the permission to try things out to see whether they worked or not and added that this was just what the Beshara Trust had been doing in recent years, whilst continuing to work under the name of Beshara. They thought that if the name has become degraded through our habituation then the solution is to redeem the name by removing our habituation. It was agreed that this was an interior process and a matter of private interior rigour.

It was not clear to everyone that the proposal actually involved removing the name Beshara entirely; that to describe Chisholme as the 'home of the Beshara courses' was still a good way of describing it, whilst allowing the Institute and its new Principal flexibility in the ways they might choose to deliver their educational aims; that the Beshara courses should continue to be an integral part of the CI's programme, which would lose hugely if it were not, and that it was for the Institute Directors to request permission from the Beshara Trust to continue to do so. What was most important was that both bodies took responsibility for their particular remit and for their decisions making, which should in future follow the democratic procedure of elected Trustees and Directors consulting among themselves and with their supporters.

A number of points were made about the inadequacy of publicity to date. Whilst the inestimable value of what people had learned through their association with Beshara was palpable in the passion with which people spoke, there is room for improvement in both the use of the website and networking to broaden the profile of Chisholme and also in the ability to stand up in the public domain and communicate clearly what it is that is so valued in Beshara.

A reminder was given of the largeness of Bulent's original vision 40 years ago and the importance of its principles being present on a world scale. It was envisaged that they would and needed to reach world leaders to help them cope with impending crises brought about by unsustainable and unrestricted growth. This required an organisational model fit for operation on an international level with all the bodies working together. This vision did not happen in the past perhaps because none of us had the level of maturity or the kind of worldly experience necessary to make it happen. However there is a much greater strength and depth of knowledge now.

A number of people spoke with great gratitude for what Beshara meant to them and the hugely positive impact it had had on their lives. Perhaps what most characterised the meeting was the

tremendous energy it released. One metaphor was of the different instruments of an orchestra tuning their discordant notes as necessary preparation for the harmony of the upcoming performance. Differences of views were not to be regarded as negative but were a healthy and heartfelt sign of engagement at what is a critical point of development for the future. The meeting ended with the optimistic assessment that a great amount of goodwill would come from this engagement with each other, that it is wonderful that everyone still cares so much and that we all care about the same thing.

### **Ideas and plans for the future**

It was intended that the Meeting finish with time given to forward planning and discussion of the way ahead for the Beshara Trust in the coming period. As it happened the previous conversation was still in full flow at the time we had to vacate the room. These are some of the ideas that were either submitted in advance of the meeting or came up in the course of the afternoon.

- making events more dynamic by broadening them from a tendency towards in-house speakers
- request for the Trust to be a stronger light for tolerance in an increasingly fundamentalist world by addressing the current issue for mankind, identified as the issue of belief.
- proposal for a 2 day seminar in conjunction with the Scientific and Medical Network
- making more use of modern technology e.g to develop a programme of webinars
- Helpful advice on seeking funding for Beshara Trust activities

Full discussion of these and other ideas will have to take place at a future time and place.