

## Familiarity

Familiarity – what does it mean to you? For some, ‘familiarity breeds contempt’, not too dissimilar to a prophet not being welcomed in their hometown. For others, being surrounded by familiar things and people is reassuring. But how well do we know the familiar? I’ve often wondered about the saying ‘I know it like the back of my hand.’ To be honest, I’m not sure if I was shown a series of photographs of the backs of people’s hands whether I’d be able to recognise my own. Interestingly, there’s no real knowledge of what gave rise to this statement although it’s generally believed to be a mid-twentieth century addition to our language despite a few earlier mentions having been found, one most notably in 1893.

What is it about familiarity? Why do we accept some familiar things and reject others? Why do we find it easier to get to know ‘others’ than to know our own? For example, it’s easier to explore other cultures and faiths than it is to question or explore why there are differences within our own. We tell ourselves we know our own, but do we really? How often, do we stop and look at what we think we know? To use another clichéd saying, do we ‘stop and smell the roses’? How often do we take time out to look at that familiar thing, person, plant or animal – I mean, really take time out to consider what it is that we value and why?

Recently, a number of photographs have circulated on social media of small things in people’s gardens, the mushrooms growing in the cracks in the path, a bee snuggling into a flower, a close up of a flower or leaf. Spring is a time of new birth and growth. A time of new beginnings and wonder, but also a time of consistency and ongoing-ness. In looking at the new, do we ignore or turn a blind-eye to that evergreen which has kept the colour in our garden all winter? What is subtly happening to it during this spring-time?



At this time of Passover and Easter with Ramadan following soon after, how much are we taking for granted? Isn’t it time we looked at these familiar events or festivals a little more closely? I’m not talking about looking at the ‘other’ festivals, I’m talking about our own one. Are we stopping to consider the emotions of the different people involved, the smells, the colours, the peripheral conversations which didn’t get recorded? How are our current circumstances opening new windows onto the past? And for those of us who just can’t resist exploring the ‘other’, how can learning about the ‘other’ challenge us to know our own better? This [2016 experience](#) gives some food for thought.

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