

# Thoughts in a Pandemic



*Reflexions of Friends in  
Belgium & Luxembourg Yearly Meeting  
During the 2020 Corona Virus Pandemic*



*These texts were written during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic - an unprecedented time of loss. Millions of people around the world lost loved ones, many have lost their livelihoods and most of us lost the freedom to live our lives as normal. But many of us also found more time to reflect on our lives, our priorities and what a better future might look like.*

*We all had to adapt to unprecedented circumstances and Friends have been no exception. We moved to virtual forms of gathering which brought unexpectedly positive experiences but also challenges of worshipping via technological tools. All of these experiences have inspired this collection of writings and we hope that it will grow.*

*If you wish to share one or all of the texts with friends, please contact the Clerk of BLYM ([quakerclerk@gmail.com](mailto:quakerclerk@gmail.com)) out of courtesy to those whose texts they are.*

*Should you feel moved to share your own experiences, please contact the Clerk likewise.*



*Thanks go to all contributors for their writings and images.*

*September 2020*



English version below

## Corona als deel van ons leven.

We beleven een moeilijke periode in ons leven. Sinds enkele maanden beheerst één enkel thema de actualiteit. Een onzichtbaar wezentje, het coronavirus waart met ernstige gevolgen rond in onze maatschappij. In mijn kennissenkring hebben meerdere mensen met de ziekte te maken gehad. De vader van mijn buurvrouw is na bijna 3 weken beademing bezweken en in stilte begraven. De schoonvader van mijn dochter kwam ook op intensieve verzorging terecht, maar is genezen. De man van een collega van mijn vrouw belandde ook in de kliniek, maar is na een pijnlijke periode aan de beterhand. De dochter van een vriend van me heeft de ziekte ook doorgemaakt, maar had minder klachten en is genezen. Corona is echt geen ver van ons bed show. Ik bewonder de moed en inzet van mijn buurvrouw, die als verpleegster werkt in de corona-afdeling van het ziekenhuis te Lier en nu al meerdere weken letterlijk de dood in de ogen kijkt en erg moet opletten om zelf niet besmet te worden. Ook mijn vrouw Anita werkt gewoon verder in de zorgsector, zij het in een minder risikovolle omgeving en uiteraard met mondkap, handschoenen, ontsmettende gel en een hoofdkap. We merken dat in zulke perioden mensen boven zichzelf uitstijgen en onversaagd blijven doen wat noodzakelijk is. Ze zijn lichtende voorbeelden van liefde voor de medemens.

De maatregelen die de overheden namen op advies van virologen kwamen niets te vroeg. We beseffen allen dat deze noodzakelijk zijn. Eerder was de aanbeveling om in onze meeting elkaar geen handen meer te geven bij het einde van de stilte een wijze beslissing. Gelukkig heeft mijn inziens geen van de Vrienden de ziekte opgelopen.

Aanvankelijk steeg het aantal besmettingen snel, maar door de strenge voorschriften kon de verspreiding van de ziekte gekeerd worden. Voor sommige mensen brak met de lock-out een zware periode aan. Dag in dag uit tussen 4 muren vertoeven kan deprimerend zijn en spanningen en stress meebrengen. Ik kan er van meespreken uit de tijd toen ik als dienstweigeraar in de gevangenis verbleef. Voor veel mensen in een klein appartementje lijkt het wel alsof ze ook in een gevangenis vertoeven. De wetenschap dat eenzame afzondering voorbij gaat geeft echter hoop en perspectief bij mensen in de gevangenis. Geduldig kunnen wachten is een mooie gave in zulke situaties, dat heb ik in mijn cel van 2,5 x 4 meter ook geleerd. Ook de coronastorm zal overwaaien. Een beetje noodgedwongen afzondering en eenzaamheid kan ons leven verdiepen en leert ons de essentie kennen van het bestaan. Eenvoud en rust zijn uiteindelijk positieve eigenschappen die veel mensen ontberen en herontdekken in deze omstandigheden. In het evangelie lezen we dat Jezus meermaals naar eenzame plaatsen trok om in stilte het Licht te zoeken. Bezinning hoort bij de zoektocht naar de zin van leven.

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Ook bij Vrienden kan de coronakrisis sporen nalaten. Quakers zijn niet immuun voor corona, en evenmin voor de gevolgen en de frustraties die een lange periode van sociale en economische stilstand en isolatie meebrengen. Wie zonder werk valt kan in een krappe financiële toestand belanden. Het gemis aan sociale dagelijkse omgang met familie, (klein)kinderen, (groot)ouders en vrienden zal anderen dan weer zwaar vallen. Toch kunnen we onszelf en eventuele huisgenoten trakteren met opmonterende bezigheden, b.v. een wandeling of fietstochtje. Er zijn nog zoveel boeiende boeken te lezen. We kunnen misschien onze kookkunsten aanscherpen door nieuwe en gezonde

recepten te bereiden. Met een telefoontje, kaartje, berichtje of brief kunnen we elkaar ook verrassen, want niet iedereen is vertrouwd met het internet. We leren hierdoor misschien wel onszelf en anderen een beetje meer "thuis" te voelen in ons 'kot'.

We kunnen ons optrekken aan de veerkracht die onze maatschappij laat zien. Men is inventief bezig om bij komende stappen tot normalisering van het openbaar leven de overdracht van het virus te beletten. Plexi-schotten, mondkapjes, ontsmettingsmiddelen en afstand houden zullen ons hierbij helpen. Koortsachtig wordt gezocht naar vaccins en doeltreffende medicatie, men test deze nu al uit en de verwachting is dat er binnen afzienbare tijd resultaat zal zijn.

De digitale mogelijkheden worden nu meer omarmd om toch contact te houden met elkaar. Zelf leerde ik nieuwe manieren van communiceren kennen zoals 'Zoom'. Op die manier worstelen we ons doorheen deze beperkende tijden. We kunnen zo positieve oplossingen aanleren en gebruiken. Onze meetings gaan dus door, intensiever dan voorheen. Via Zoom zijn we vier maal per week in de mogelijkheid om een stille meeting te bezoeken. Sommigen Vrienden kunnen nu met enkele muisklikken een meeting bijwonen zonder verlies van reistijd. Het doet deugd om ons verbonden te voelen en elkaar te kunnen zien en spreken na de meeting. Ik kan ieder van ons als lid of verbundene alleen maar aanmoedigen om digitale meetings bij te wonen. Dat kan elke zondag van 10:30 tot 11:15 uur, met gelegenheid nog wat langer na te blijven. De midweekse meeting gaan door op maandag, woensdag en vrijdag, telkens van 19:30 tot 20:00 uur, met gelegenheid tot een babbeltje achteraf.



Misschien willen sommigen onder ons ook hun ervaring en omgang met corona meedelen, we verwelkomen graag hun bijdragen.

*6 mei 2020, Jan Peeters, BLYM Ouderling*

## **Corona as part of our lives.**

We are going through a difficult period in our lives. For a few months now, a single theme has dominated the world today. An invisible creature, the corona virus haunts our society with serious consequences. In my circle of acquaintances, several people have had to deal with the disease. The father of my neighbour has succumbed after almost 3 weeks of artificial respiration and has been silently buried. The father-in-law of my daughter also entered intensive care, but was cured. The husband of a colleague of my wife also ended up in the clinic, but after a painful period he is better off. The daughter of a friend of mine also had the disease, but had fewer symptoms and has been cured. Corona is very close to us. I admire the courage and dedication of my neighbour, who works as a nurse in the corona ward of the hospital in Lier and has been literally looking death in the eye for several weeks now and has to be very careful not to get infected herself. My wife Anita also continues to work in the healthcare sector, albeit in a less risky environment and of course with a face mask, gloves, disinfectant gel and a protective hood. We notice that in such periods people rise above them-

selves and continue to do what is necessary. They are shining examples of love for one's fellow man.

The measures taken by the public authorities on the advice of virologists came not a moment too soon. We all realize that they are necessary. Previously, the recommendation in our Meeting not to give each other hands at the end of the silence was a wise decision. Fortunately, in my opinion, no Friends have contracted the disease.

Initially, the number of infections increased rapidly, but the strict regulations made it possible to limit the spread of the disease. For some people the lockdown started a difficult period. Day in and day out between 4 walls can be depressing and can bring tension and stress. I can speak of it from my time in prison as a conscientious objector. For a lot of people in a small apartment it almost seems as if they are also in a prison. However, knowing that isolation will pass by gives hope and perspective to people in prison. Being able to wait patiently is a gift in such situations, I also learned that in my cell measuring 2.5 x 4 meters. Also the "corona storm" will blow over. A little necessary confinement and solitude can deepen our lives and teach us the essence of existence. Simplicity and peace are ultimately positive qualities that so many people lack and rediscover in these circumstances. In the gospel we read that Jesus repeatedly went to isolated places to seek the Light in silence. Reflection is part of the search for the meaning of life.

Also with Friends, the corona- crisis can leave its marks. Quakers are not immune to corona, nor to the consequences and frustrations of a long period of social and economic stagnation and isolation. Those who fall out of work can end up in a tight financial situation. The lack of social daily contact with family, (grand)children, (grand)parents and friends will be hard on many others. Nevertheless, we can treat ourselves and possible housemates with upbeat activities, e.g. a walk or bike ride. There are so many interesting books to read. We might be able to refine our cooking skills by preparing new and healthy recipes. With a phone call, card, message or letter we can also surprise each other, because not everyone is familiar with the internet. We might learn to feel ourselves and others a little more "at home" in our own 'kot'.

We can pull ourselves up to the resilience that our world is showing. People are inventively working to prevent the transmission of the virus in the next steps to restore normality in public life. Plexi dividers, face masks, disinfectants and keeping our distance will help us to do this. People are feverishly searching for vaccines and effective medication, they are already testing them out and the expectation is that there will be results in the near future.

The electronic options are now being more widely used in order to keep in touch with each other. I myself learned new ways of communicating such as 'Zoom'. In this way we are wrestling through these confined times. In this way we can learn and use positive solutions. We are continuing our Meetings, more intensively than before. Via Zoom we are able to attend a silent meeting four times a week. Some Friends can now attend a Meeting with just a few mouse clicks and no travel time is lost. It is great to feel connected and to be able to see and speak to each other after the meeting. I can only encourage each of us as a member or connected person to attend digital meetings.

This can be done every Sunday from 10:30 am to 11:15 am, with the opportunity to stay a little longer. The midweek meeting takes place on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 19:30 to 20:00, with the opportunity to have a chat afterwards.

Maybe some of you would like to share your experience and dealings with corona. we would welcome your contributions.

6 May 2020, Jan Peeters, BLYM Elder, translated with <https://www.deepl.com/> and edited by R Rzewnicki

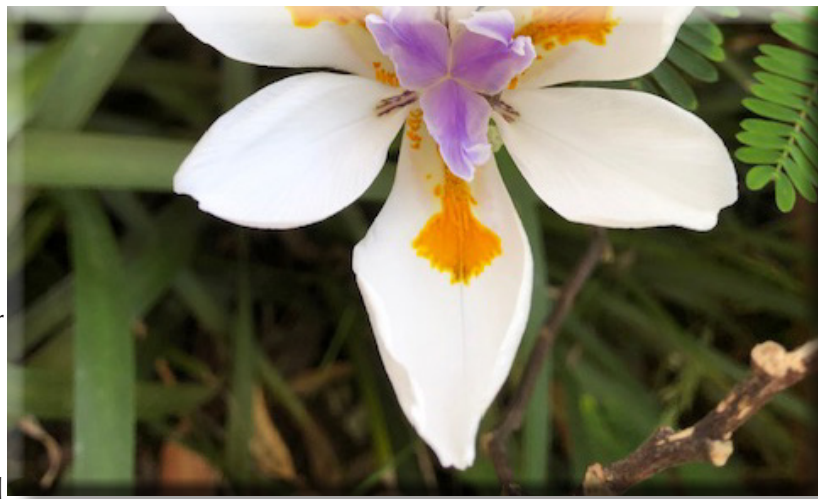
*Knowing that isolation will pass by gives hope and perspective to people in prison. Being able to wait patiently is a gift in such situations*



## Coping in Corona Times

Friends -

I send greetings to you in your home from all of us in our home nearby Quaker House in Brussels. Our family is all together, since Frieda and Esther came home from their studies abroad. After two months together, I'm happy to say that "All's well." This is new for all of us, but we're coping. My wife has full



time tele-work every week day at her desk in our family room. Ben, 13, has had full-time school from the first day of "Corona Time." His school arranged that all teachers have contact with all students on the same schedule they had in "real school." We are grateful that we have the space, computers, and many other resources to help us get by.

Being closed in by four walls I've also had to face challenges to my physical and mental health and well-being. While no one I know has had COVID19, it's not far away. And the consequences of confinement are impacting all of us. There were two deaths in our children's social circles and no one knew what to do to comfort the grieving.

The confinement was really affecting my mood. I started paying more attention to how I was feeling, and noticing that I had some "good days" and some "bad days".

So when it was clear that confinement would continue for some time, I worked out a programme that includes daily walks or bike rides, usually with a family member, checking on friends & neighbours, keeping to a schedule, doing something, especially things that "only I can do" as a parent, neighbor, residents' group member, etc.

Doing this helps me appreciate each day, or feel useful, and social. Get out, breathe fresh air. See the sunshine, sunset, moonrise. Venus was very bright. With family, walking gives us some quality time, and a chance to talk one-to-one. At neighbours' doorsteps I've learned that there's almost no COVID19 in our area. That's reassuring. Some like parts of the confinement, and want to see them continue, such as the reduced work stress, working from home, the reduced traffic and safer streets...

I've also paid attention to all of the work that people are doing, to help others and themselves cope with the situation. Many Friends have been working hard to adjust to Corona times: for example, the many Quaker Zoom Meetings, for worship, reading & study groups, group videos, and worship sharing. New initiatives like Quaker Meals on Wheels were set up to deal with specific needs. Other adaptations were made to allow work to continue as much as possible. BLYM 'officers' have been working hard on every part of our Meeting: clerks, elders, finance, oversight, residential planning, and more. I see this kind of action, good will and cooperation also happening at many other levels: neighbourhood, community, city, country and even international level.

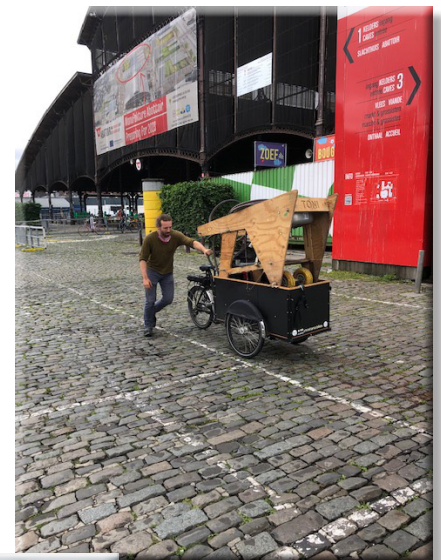
While some leaders get attention for bad behavior, I prefer to focus on the ones who are working for the common good, like the EU head who organized pledges of billions of euros for the development of vaccines to be available for every country. While there are so many uncertainties and good reasons to worry, I try to focus on facts, scientific, political and social. That includes the fact that researchers are sharing their information widely and scientific publishers have dropped paywalls. Experts have said "We've never learned so much so fast about any



disease in human history". I see that the responses to Corona show that governments CAN take 'radical' action and people WILL follow new rules when it's clear that it's needed. These things give me hope for the future. Even while my daughters don't know if they can go back to university in September, I'm asking the City for permission to close our street for our annual Charles Quint Street Party. In September. Maybe we won't be able to do it. Maybe very few will want to come. But I'm hopeful and planning for better days. I hope you are too.

Go well friends

*Randy Rzewnicki, 13 May 2020*



## Reflections on Silence

The lockdown experience we have gone through has allowed some of us to be aware of the sounds of nature that can be heard when the noise of the busy areas where we live is no longer there. This break from the constant hum of traffic has been for some people a chance to get back in touch with nature, for others it has been unsettling. For me, I realised that silence can be both enriching and disturbing. Enriching because it allows me to reflect and disturbing because it confronts me to my own self.

Quakers are a community that is rooted in Christianity. One of our beliefs is that there is something that emerges when we sit in silent worship that has a transforming power. This allows us to set aside our everyday self and encounter the mystery and grace of God present in the silence. In the booklet "Quality and Depth of Worship and Ministry," we are asked whether we recognise that ministry can be given in silence as well as through the spoken word. We have a tendency to focus on words rather than on what there is behind those words and as such, the written or the spoken words, in my personal and professional experience, can, when not rooted in the silence, scatter and divide whereas silence brings peace and unity.

Silence can be active or passive. When I prepare for Meeting for Worship and enter the silence, for me it becomes an active silence in which I wait in worship to hear God's words. We hear about being open to transformation in our spiritual practice and for me, this Silence is one of the ways in which I can experience a deep transforming energy that can change and purify my soul.

We talk about Quakers being searchers and on a spiritual journey. As with any journey, there are times when

we do not know where we are going and when we get lost. We are exhorted to come to Meeting for Worship even when we are going through periods of darkness. In my experience, when I am going through these periods of dryness, my hope is that in the silence I may find the grace of inward quiet and of deep peace as I connect to the Light/God. The challenge at this moment is in finding that connection through virtual Meetings. This has not been easy.

It is because of my experience of lockdown, of feeling cut off from the world of Friends and of going through the frustration of not being more useful, that I decided to use this time to reflect on what silence means to me. For this opportunity, I feel grateful and humbled.

*Jeannette Delgado*



## Some Reflections from Corona Time (part 1)

Some months ago, a Friend said in Meeting in Brussels, 'I am praying to a God I'm not sure I believe in.' Nobody developed this further in the ministry that followed; for me this period of confinement has thrown some light on this question.

I read the other day that according to opinion surveys in the USA, about 65% of the population say that they are praying again and approximately the same percentage think that the corona virus has been sent as a warning or punishment from God. Most people say that they are praying for the pandemic to end. In Europe, the percentage is a little lower, but in general many people seem to be praying again and for the same outcome as our American friends. An elderly Italian lady interviewed on the TV news last week, had what I would say was a 'medieval' attitude to the situation when she insisted that God had sent the virus as a punishment for our wickedness. What are we to make of this?

Prayer of course means asking, even if many now realise that it should be something deeper, more an act of contemplation, and for most people that is still what it is, asking ... Please God, don't let this happen to me ...

Please God let me get that new job ... A number of footballers now cross themselves or point to the sky when they score a goal, as if God had been enlisted in their efforts to defeat the other team. Unfortunately, God is also the God of the opposing side, but perhaps he allows himself a degree of partisanship on Saturday afternoons? But at a deeper level, is God a being that will take away scourges when we ask or bribe him (yes, him, because that sort of God is the male God of old) and give us presents or favours when we do what he approves of. Is that the nature of God, in fact?

For myself, I can say that the god I believe in is not a god. In fact, I'm not even sure that believe is the right word to use. We humans so often get ourselves confused about the reality that we try to grasp because we use words loosely but imagine that they are definitive, clear and can be grasped by everyone else. The





way I see it is that we humans certainly experience transcendence, divinity and that is a real experience, but we go wrong when we try to label it. The great theologians of the Middle Ages, Christian, Jewish and Moslem all said that God is best describes as Nothing, because it is impossible for us to make any meaningful comparison or description, we should rather point to the experience than try to capture it in words. An experience that awes us and carries us beyond words; an experience that surrounds us but cannot be grasped.



The images that arise in my mind are from Exodus. Moses goes into the desert and sees a burning bush that burns without ceasing and realises that he is in the divine presence; when he asks, 'Who are you?', the answer is 'I am that I am' – nothing more, nothing less. When he later climbs Mount Sinai again, this time as he leaves Egypt leading the now free Israelites, he meets this presence again and receives the Law, which he is instructed to take down to the people of Israel waiting below. However, when he arrives at the foot of the mountain, he finds the people worshipping a Golden Calf that they have made for themselves. Perhaps this is the god that people are praying to today, but is it the Presence, the ground of our existence, is it the 'I am' that is shrouded in mystery?

I finish by repeating that Quaker ministry from the 17th century that I am so very fond of, and which describes the only theology that I know by experience in the process of centring down in our silent meetings, 'In stillness is fullness, in fullness is nothingness, in nothingness are all things.' Can we say more than that?

*Phil Gaskell*

22.05.2020

## Reflections From Corona Time (part 2)

A few weeks ago, at the height of the Covid 19 crisis as the number of new infections and deaths increased exponentially, and there seemed to be no easy defence other than to wash your hands furiously and to self-isolate, I thought to myself, 'in a few weeks' time I could be in intensive care or already dead'. It's normal at my time of life to begin to look back and evaluate the course of one's life and, as corona struck, it seemed even more a natural reflex.

Boris Johnson when a boy is reported to have said that he intended to be king of the world when he became an adult. I never had those thoughts, but I did feel that I had some specific contribution to make. I have no idea what that contribution was supposed to be, nor do I know if I have made any particular contribution. I do know that I have usually acted as I believed to be right and that it has often cost me dear; this is not a reason

to congratulate me, because I could do no other. The details I will keep for another occasion! Certainly, growing up as a gay man has not made life easier, and it has certainly cost me dear too, but I don't regret that either as you can only be yourself. 'Be yourself,' said Oscar Wilde, 'everyone else is taken.'

*'Be yourself,'  
said Oscar Wilde,  
'everyone else is taken.'*

## *‘When you don’t have what you want, you have to want what you have’*

As I look at the members of my family and my friends, I realise that I am most probably the least rich person I know in the material sense. That has a lot to do with those decisions I have felt I had to take, no matter what. However, on the non-material level, I also realise that I’m very rich in terms of health, happiness, curiosity, inspiration and enthusiasm and those gifts many do not find however rich and famous they may become. Some-

times, wealth and fame bring the opposite to all that is good in life. ‘What is success?’, our Friend Edward Haasl used to ask. Well, it’s impossible to say, perhaps it is something that we can only answer for ourselves inwardly.

Our reference point should not be those we know, because we are all far too rich in every respect. Our ‘first’ world societies are so scandalously rich that we should be very troubled. So many in our world lack all life’s good things, are not even permitted to enjoy the respect of others or any satisfaction or respect of self in their short lives. My experience of the poorer part of the world has not been very extensive, but I was very struck when walking in the countryside in southern Thailand a few years ago, I came upon a village of houses with thatched roofs and mud and wattle walls. As I got closer I was greeted by smiling faces of people living in what I can only describe as ‘dire simplicity’ to use Quaker-ish terminology. To my surprise, a young man spoke to me in English. He explained that he worked in a nearby hotel. He must have read my thoughts as I looked at his home and vegetable patch; ‘When you don’t have what you want, you have to want what you have’ he said. I was put to shame, here was I, a rich, yes rich, European tourist pitying him and his family who were living at a level that was most probably about the global average in terms of wealth and comfort. Perhaps the level that we should all be living at if we are to save the planet.

So, returning to my corona reflections, what right do we have to complain because we do not have all that we would like, that we do not have enough time, that we might die sooner than we would like. Our lives are a time of gifts for us all, even if we consider ourselves poor materially or spiritually, disappointed or wrongly treated. We should rather cultivate gratitude for what we have received without merit – life itself and all its riches.

*Phil Gaskell*

*5 June 2020*

### **More Reflections From Corona Time (part 3)**

This pandemic and lockdown have been terrible, we all know that, even if we haven’t lost anyone as a result. It’s also been a welcome step back from the usual rush of life and that has something to teach many of us, though we may not realise it. But, if we stand back from the human emotions for a moment, there is more to consider; what an amazing example it is of connect-



edness.

For much of the time we feel so remote from other people, especially those geographically far away. Corona time has given us a different experience. Earlier pandemics have taken a long time to travel round the globe: back in the European Middle Age, it took the Bubonic Plague, often called the Black Death, more than 25

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years to arrive in Europe from its origins in China; the so-called 'Spanish' flu towards the end of the First World War travelled much more rapidly, but the corona virus seems to have spread around the world in a matter of weeks. How amazing it is to think that sometime last autumn a bat in central China passed on this virus to another animal, perhaps a pangolin and then transmission took place

to its first human victim. Since then the virus has been passed on to more than 7 million people; a real success story for this newcomer to life on earth. How connected we all are; how close to each other we are – person to person, we are all in the web of life.

That is not the only aspect of connectedness that the pandemic has thrown up. We humans, in various degrees of isolation, have felt the need to reach out to each other at a rate that is rarely seen. I'm not sure if there are any statistics on this, but I can say in my own case, that the number of text messages, emails, phone calls, Skype conversations has certainly at least doubled over the last three months. Quakers among other groups have taken to cyberspace in unprecedented numbers and many now attend Meetings for Worship on several continents on a weekly basis. Once again, how very connected we are and largely without damage to the environment. Travelling is not always necessary and, of course, has never been available to many who are not able to pay the still heavy cost of frequent international travel. There are positive outcomes for the environment as well as for our connectedness as a human community.

So, what about our small Quaker community in Belgium and Luxembourg, whose official title has almost as many letters as we have members? We, in Brussels, have always regretted the sense of remoteness from the Meeting in Luxembourg and now from the growing Meeting in Ghent – forgive the English spelling, but a Flemish Friend recently pointed out to me that in an English text, Gent might be misunderstood. Of course, Luxembourg and Ghent are as far from Brussels as Brussels is from the other two cities, but capital-city dwellers are always resistant to travel out to smaller places while regretting the fact that they do not come to 'us'; we're in the Heart of Europe after all! Brussels Quakers are certainly guilty of that; I am no exception and for this I apologise. Even further afield than the territory of our YM, we have members and former attenders elsewhere - in York in the UK, near Seattle in the USA to mention just two, and these can now also be familiar faces on a weekly basis. The new connectedness is a gift to us as we can now build community all year long, not just see each other, perhaps, once a year at the residential Yearly Meeting and whisper to another Friend, 'I know her face, but can you remind me of her name?'

*Phil Gaskell*

*9 June 2020*



## Quaker Roots

The Religious Society of Friends is rooted in Christianity and has always found inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus. How do you interpret your faith in the light of this heritage? How does Jesus speak to you today? Are you following Jesus' example of love in action? Are you learning from his life the reality and cost of obedience to God? How does his relationship with God challenge and inspire you?

Advices and Queries 4, BYM Quaker Faith and Practice

We are taught that Quakerism is rooted in Christianity, but without much explanation of what that means. In the same way that early Christianity was rooted in Judaism, we are rooted in Christianity. It is our spiritual culture, the ground from which we grew, the language and concepts we use to describe our direct experiences with God.

Our roots nourish us and hold us steady, but we are not our roots. Rather, we grow beyond them. In the same way that early Christians grew from their Jewish roots into something different, Quakers take their Christian roots and grow into something different, which fits our experience with God.

*I'm pretty sure that Jesus never said, "pick up your cross and worship me". I think what he said was "...follow me"*

helps us to connect to our roots and then go beyond them to "let our lives speak"; to work for the world we want to see.

Gandhi is often quoted as saying, "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." Quakerism began as a return to early Christianity, to the work of Jesus. In many ways, Quakers continue to do this, to respond to Jesus rather than to the Christ. To follow the one who said that we need to "love one another", rather than the one who is represented in many modern Christian churches.

I often think about Jesus. Jesus the man, not Jesus the Christ. I wonder, for example, what kind of accent did he have and what did that accent say about him? How did he part his hair? What did he call his mom? We hear he was a carpenter—was there one piece he created that he was particularly proud of? Did he like his work? What did he say when he smashed his thumb with a hammer? What was his favorite color? His favorite meal? His favorite swear word? Could he swim? There is so much we do not know about this man and about the things that formed him to be the one we still talk about 2000 years after his death.

One of the things that first attracted me to Quakers is the notion that revelation didn't stop 2000 years ago. It continues today, as Friends wait in anticipation for divine inspiration and then share their ministry with each other and with the world.

What does this mean, then? The mystical



Jesus was rooted in his family, in his culture and in his religion. They informed every aspect of his life. But he was not only that culture – he went beyond it. He even rejected large parts of it.

I can't claim to be a student of the Bible, but I'm pretty sure that Jesus never said, "pick up your cross and worship me". I think what he said was "...follow me". Do what I do: tend the sick, feed the hungry, welcome the stranger." I believe that the Quaker form of worship

*I believe that the roots of Quakerism  
[...] are in the man  
who taught us to love one another.  
It's that simple and that difficult.*

nature of Quakerism means that my experience may not be yours. However, I believe that the roots of Quakerism are not in the steeplehouses and the hierarchies of Christianity. I believe that those roots are in the man who taught us to love one another. It's that simple and that difficult.

*Kate McNally*

## Thoughts During Corona Time

It all began with the QCEA Study Tour, that didn't take place.

Q-Headquarters rang me while I was at an outpatient's home in Mid-March. The Friend in question told me that due to Corona some of the older participants from other countries had already cancelled, but asked if I and Nassim (my son) would still join nonetheless so that the two Friends from Rwanda and Belarus (who had overcome all the obstacles and difficulties of getting a visa) wouldn't be on their own. Also, some MEPs had offered to speak to us in QH as the main EU institutions had already been shut to the public.

Well OF COURSE! was my first reaction—(after having lived in the Middle East, you don't trust anything that you hear on official media so the whole Corona news hadn't concerned me at that time). But the Friend being English by origin was polite and asked me again, if I was sure and what would my son think of travelling. It would be okay to take a day to consider before making a decision for a yes or no.

And then Fear started to creep into my system, slowly sneaking into my thoughts. Well, it's six hours on the train, IN the train, together with all the other passengers spreading corona. What if I catch it? I'd have to close my practice. What would my family live of then? What would the disease do to me? Well, never mind myself, but could I take the responsibility of bringing my son into a situation of Risk? He only finished High School last year, he is at the doorstep of his own adult life, how could I dare taking all this away from him by putting him at risk during these long hours in the train, the Metro and the overcrowded streets of Brussels?!? We're from the countryside and not used to Urban Air!

While feeling torn, our QH Friend said something wise that has upheld me since. I can't quote him literally because the meaning of his words, i.e. how they came across to me, touched me, shook me and strengthened me:

*...we have a responsibility  
to the World that we are not  
pulled down by Fear, [...] and we let the World see  
how to do this with our  
Testimony of Life .*

How are we Quakers dealing with Fear? I think we have a responsibility to the World that we are not pulled down by Fear, that we can overcome Fear and we let the World see how to do this with our Testimony of Life .

A few days later the Study Tour was cancelled as part of Belgium's Lockdown and I had a week off. The world seemed to have come to a standstill. Birdsongs and Blue Sky helped loosening the chains of time pressure that imperceptibly had been suffocating the Heart.

During that week some of my patients called to cancel their appointments until the pandemic was over. Oth-

ers rang and asked if the practice was open (I'm a physiotherapist, selfemployed at my own practice in a smallish rural town situated on the High Street between a bank and the whiskey shop).

What should I do? You can't keep a metre and a half distance when treating people. Then the words of our QH Friend came back to mind: how are Quakers dealing with Fear? How am I dealing with Fear?

Lacking a geographically near-by Meeting for Clearing, I went into Silence and brought my question into the Light.

The week after I went back to work.

Working as a Physio is a dangerous job because you never know what illnesses people may have and not telling you. Touching people's skin is part of the therapy. Of course, open wounds or rashes are off limits and if in doubt, I then wear surgeon's gloves.

I'm not letting Fear get the better of me. Thank God I'm healthy, have no systemic diseases, my age is borderlining not quite the risk-group, I have got space and a house with a garden, clean water, fresh air, enough and good food from the local farmers. I have opportunities to meditate, look after my Mind and Spirit, share time with my loving family and nurture my Soul during Worship with Friends. This is so much more than many others. So who am I not to share my riches?

Strengthened by the Inner Light, I felt that I want to be there for those patients who need their physical treatment and who decided they'd want to leave their house and attend my practice.

How do we deal with Fear?—This keeps being my underlying notion when entering my working rooms.

There is so much contradicting information about the Virus, infection, contagiousness, numbers in hospitals and graveyards etc. I sensed big Confusion and Uncertainty and Insecurity in the air.

So apart from the physical treatment of orthopedic and neurological ailments, I felt —as a Quaker—that it is my duty to be there for those who need Healing. Healing in a holistic sort of meaning. The need for Touch is a deep archaic need of the humans, being associated with warmth and shelter.

Also for me to be there in person, the patients could talk and were listened to, they could share their sorrows, fear, hopes and general thoughts, this in turn having positive effect on their physical health.

(Airing the rooms, disinfecting the massage tables and physio-material, washing hands properly and often—all this is normal procedure with every physiotherapist anyway. ).

During these corona-weeks/months I have also learned to acknowledge my own limits in a positive way. But I will ponder on this some other time.

*Susanne Odeh, 12 July 2020*





**A text by Jan Peeters (NL & EN)**

**“Bakhuis” Photo credit Jan Peeters**

Vrienden,

De laatste maanden kenden we in onze meeting enkele pijnlijke momenten. Dat is niet zo uitzonderlijk. Waar mensen samenkomen kunnen problemen en wrijvingen ontstaan. Zelfs met de beste bedoelingen kan er soms frustratie en pijn ervaren worden. We dragen vrede hoog in ons vaandel, niet voor niets staan Quakers bekend als één van de weinige vredeskerken, maar we ontberen af en toe het vermogen om onze zaken op een vredelievende manier te behandelen. Ook in de vroege kristelijke gemeente viel het voor dat er conflicten waren. Paulus spoorde daarom de leden van meerdere kristelijke gemeenten aan hun verantwoordelijkheid te nemen om elkaar op liefdevolle manier te bejegenen. (Romeinen 12: 9-21, 14: 13) In Jakobus 4: 11 vermaant de apostel om geen kwaad van elkaar te spreken.

Ik weet het wel, het is gemakkelijker gezegd dan gedaan. In dezelfde bijbel lezen we hoe Petrus en Paulus een konflikt kenden over uiteenlopende standpunten. (Galaten 2: 11) Ook onder Quakers zijn aanvaringen mogelijk. Hoewel we hoge standaarden hanteren, slagen we er niet altijd in die in de praktijk om te zetten. We hebben allen een eigen visie, karakter en temperament. Emoties sturen ons véél meer dan we beseffen en zetten ons wel eens meer op het verkeerde been. Een voorbeeld hiervan was de botsing tussen Georges Fox en James Nayler in 1656. Na een theatrale akt van Nayler die de Vrienden in een slecht daglicht plaat-

ste, brak Fox met zijn geloofsgenoot voor een geruime tijd. Ondanks een pijnlijk gebeuren hebben zij zich later weer verzoend met elkaar.

Het kan dus gebeuren dat de ene vriend op het gaspedaal duwt en de andere op de rem. Er zijn rustige tot zéér rustige vrienden, maar ook dynamische tot zéér actieve en zelfs furieuze vrienden. Sommigen zijn zeer bedachtzaam en zeggen weinig, bij anderen ligt het hart op de tong. Allen zijn kinderen van het licht en zo dienen we elkaar ook te beschouwen. Ondanks de tekortkomingen die we allen hebben zijn we niet minder verschuldigd dan elkaar liefde en respect te betonen. Laat ons vanuit het licht wandelen en handelen met de mildheid die ook Jezus kenmerkte. "Wie zonder zonde is mag met stenen werpen" leerde Jezus, waarop alle betrokkenen hun stenen lieten vallen. (Johannes 8: 3 – 11) Laten we ons inspireren door de geest van God die in Kolossensen 3: 12-14 oproept om "Elkaar te verdragen, ook als de één tegen de ander een reden tot klagen heeft. Wees vergevingsgezind en vrede zal uw deel zijn."

Friends,

The last few months we had some painful moments in our meeting. That is not so exceptional. Where people come together, problems and friction can arise. Even with the best intentions, frustration and pain can sometimes be experienced. We value peace, it is not for nothing that Quakers are known as one of the few peace churches, but occasionally we lack the ability to handle our affairs in a peaceful way. Even in the early crystal-line congregation it was not uncommon for there to be conflicts. Paul therefore urged the members of several Christian congregations to take their responsibility to treat each other in a loving way. (Romans 12: 9-21, 14: 13) In James 4: 11 the apostle admonishes not to speak ill of one another.

I know, it is easier said than done. In the same Bible we read how Peter and Paul had a conflict over different points of view. (Galatians 2: 11) Collisions are also possible among Quakers. Although we have high standards, we do not always succeed in putting them into practice. We all have our own vision, character and temperament. Emotions steer us much more than we realise and sometimes put us on the wrong track. An example of this was the clash between Georges Fox and James Nayler in 1656. After a theatrical act by Nayler that placed the Friends in a bad light, Fox broke up with his fellow believer for quite some time. Despite a painful event, they later reconciled again.

So it can happen that one friend pushes the accelerator and the other the brake. There are quiet to very quiet friends, but also dynamic to very active and even furious friends. Some are very thoughtful and say little, with others the heart is on their tongue. They are all children of light and that is how we should look at each other. Despite the shortcomings we all have, we owe each other nothing less than love and respect. Let us walk from the light and act with the mildness that also characterised Jesus. "He who is without sin may throw stones" Jesus taught, upon which all those involved dropped their stones. (John 8: 3 - 11) Let us be inspired by the spirit of God who in Colossians 3: 12-14 calls upon us to "endure one another, even if one has a reason to complain to the other. Be forgiving and peace will be your part".

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