

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 129

MAY 2014

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Dear Friends,

Several of you have written to me during the last few months and I thank you for your thoughts and encouragement. Two people have mentioned deteriorating eyesight, a problem that affects many of us as we grow older. Please let me know if you would prefer a large print version of the WQF Letter.

Referring to the February Letter, one correspondent writes that people born during the Great Depression regard poverty in a different light from that perceived by younger folk. He believes that success in life can be achieved with a minimum of food, water, shelter and clothing. Anything more than this minimum can be regarded as either “desirable” or a “luxury”, and its absence does not imply poverty. This view fits well with the Quaker testimony of Simplicity. Our correspondent also pointed out that poverty is a relative term which does not apply within a group of people who live at the same level of income and expenditure. This reminded me of my days as a student when we were all living frugally on grants. We made do with very little but never regarded ourselves as poor: in fact we remember this period of our lives as one of the happiest. Of course people who don’t have a minimum share of the resources necessary for health and well-being are the ones who need help.

*I have chosen “Quaker Silence” as the next topic for this Letter. My Monthly Meeting was recently treated to a workshop facilitated by Anne Potaka. Anne had researched the religious and social conditions that existed in George Fox’s time and asked us to think about his view of the value of silence **“Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms.”***

I have selected five of the contemporary thoughts about silence expressed at that meeting, and also five quotations from weighty Quakers. I hope that some of these will speak to your condition, as they do to mine.

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

From the workshop:

“Silence allows us to go to a deeper place of peace – a good place to be.”

“Experience of Quaker silence is like drinking from a well in an oasis.”

“Silence gives us the opportunity for feeling gratitude and for giving thanks.’

“Silence is a freedom from having to perform.”

“Silence allows a sense of merging with the universe – being a part of everything that exists.”

From Britain Yearly Meeting’s *Quaker Faith and Practice 1995*:

“True silence... is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.”

William Penn, 1699 [2.13]

“[The early Friends] made the discovery that silence is one of the best preparations for communion [with God] and for the reception of inspiration and guidance. Silence itself, of course, has no magic. It may be just sheer emptiness, absence of words or noise or music. It may be an occasion for slumber, or it may be a dead form. But it may be an intensified pause; a vitalised hush, a creative quiet, an actual moment of mutual and reciprocal correspondence with God.”

Rufus Jones, 1937 [2.16]

“Don’t feel restricted by the silence, it is there to set you free from the pressures of life. No-one is judging your movements, your thoughts... Freedom of expression is the freedom to worship God on your own terms. Value the opportunity to think, unguided by the world. Learn what you feel you need to know, let other information pass. No moment of silence is a waste of time.”

Rachel Needham, 1987 [2.17]

“Quakers do have something very special to offer the dying and the bereaved, namely that we are at home in silence. Not only are we thoroughly used to it and unembarrassed by it, but we know something about sharing it, encountering others in its depths and, above all, letting ourselves be used in it,,,”

Diana Lampen, 1979 [17.06]

“So one approaches, by efforts which call for the deepest resources of one’s being, to the condition of true silence; not just of sitting still, not just of not speaking, but of a wide awake, fully aware non-thinking. It is in this condition found and held for a brief instant only, that I have experienced the existence of something other than ‘myself’. The thinking me has vanished, and with it vanishes the sense of separation, of unique identity. One is not left naked and defenceless, as one is, for example, by the operations of the mind in self-analysis. One becomes instead aware, one is conscious of being a participant in the whole of existence, not limited to the body or the moment... It is in this condition that one understands the nature of the divine power, its essential identity with love, in the widest sense of that much misused word.

Geoffrey Hubbard, 1974 [26.12]

From Quaker *Advices and Queries* 2013, D2:

“Be faithful to your experience of the Spirit, in whatever way it has come to you. Carry it into your daily life. Do what love requires of you, which may not be the same as great busyness.”

And from *The Holy Bible, Psalm 40:10*:

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

Some events at the Quaker Settlement, 76 Virginia Rd. Whanganui 4500:

May 30 – June 2 Queen’s Birthday

This is the Fun and Work weekend – come and help with the developments in the north valley and the new Food Forest. Great food and free accommodation.

Organisers: Mandy and Nigel Brooke.

Settlement Contact: Merilyn and Michael Payne: mm.p@clear.net.nz

June 6-8 A Weekend with Rowe Morrow

Rowe is a Quaker Permaculture teacher with with many years of international experience. She will be at the Settlement as Friend in Residence and will share her rich experience.

Settlement Contact: Michael Payne: mm.p@clear.net.nz

June 27-29 Sharing our Conversations through a Spiritual Friendship Group

A small group of Quaker-connected Friends and colleagues who meet regularly will share some of their curated sessions of the past year. They will explore ways in participants might establish their own Spiritual Friendship Group. You might experience a discussion on the nature of community, consider spiritual gifts or share your reactions to an extract from a Joseph Campbell DVD.

Facilitator: Linda Wilson.

Settlement Contact: Peter Watson: pbiet@clear.net.nz

The Wider Quaker Fellowship is an association of persons of diverse backgrounds who wish to have ties with the Religious Society of Friends without necessarily being in its membership, or who, through isolation, illness or some other circumstance are unable to attend a Monthly Meeting.

Any person who finds the fundamental Quaker testimonies and the Quaker way of life, with its emphasis on sincerity and simplicity, compatible with his or her philosophy of life is welcome to join the Fellowship. A request to the Clerk will ensure enrolment as a member.