

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 137

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Dear Friends,

I've been thinking recently about the current fascination with disaster and violence. Television, radio and the print media continue to offer both in liberal amounts. Major forms of entertainment and information seem to be saturated with alarming detail. Little wonder that people seek happiness and comfort in sex, drugs and alcohol, all of which are easily abused.

What is happiness? My thesaurus suggests that it can be joy, delight, bliss, ecstasy, elation, glee, felicity, gladness, contentment, pleasure, gaiety, merriment, cheerfulness, high spirits.

Quaker writings tend to avoid use of the word "happiness". This may reflect a need for the expression of an emotion that is quite free from either complacency or irresponsibility. Quakers are more likely to use the words "cheerfulness" and "joy" which imply accompanying alertness and readiness for whatever comes next.

I've selected some descriptions of the deep sense of joy that can be experienced through engagement with the Spirit. I hope that you too are able to access cheerfulness and joy in your lives, and that this brings some compensation in times of stress.

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

Tidings of comfort and joy

"In this humanistic age we suppose man is the initiator and God is the responder ... [but] ... all our apparent initiative is already a response, a testimonial to His secret presence and working within us. The basic response of the soul to the Light is internal adoration and joy, thanksgiving and worship, self-surrender and listening.

Thomas R. Kelly, 1941: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 2 10.

"I have never lost the enjoyment of sitting in silence at the beginning of meeting, knowing that everything can happen, knowing the joy of utmost surprise; feeling that nothing is preordained, nothing is set, all is open. The light can come from all sides. The joy of experiencing the Light in a completely different way than one has thought it would come is one of the greatest gifts that Friends' meeting for worship has brought me."

Ursula Franklin, 1979: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 23 32.

*“All joy arises from a sense of being,
while the main emphasis in our society is one of having ...*

Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1985 in *Plain Living* by C. Whitmire, 2001.

George Fox wrote

“Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.”

Journal of George Fox (1694).

Clearly, Fox considered that cheerfulness could be associated with the Quaker ideal of “letting our lives speak”.

In a section of the 2002 Swarthmore Lecture¹ subtitled “Enjoyment”, Jackie Leach Scully said:

*“It would be wrong to say that Quakers don’t enjoy themselves, but as a group we often don’t give the impression of ‘walking cheerfully’ (even if Fox didn’t mean with fixed grins on our faces). It is not that we are overtly gloomy – we don’t preach sin and damnation, and we have our moments of quiet humour – but on the whole Quakers are an earnest people. Authority is given to gravity rather than lightheartedness, which is strange considering where we believe the Light should be. ... I want to make it quite clear what I mean by enjoyment. It is not necessarily the same as happiness, pleasure or having fun, although all these things are nice. The origins of the word give a better indication of its meaning in this context. **Enjoyment** comes from the old French word **enjoir**, a compound of **in** and **rejoice**. **To enjoy** is therefore to be in a state of rejoicing ... The enjoyment I mean, then, is rejoicing in God’s recreational presence. It is not a frivolous adjunct to the serious business of life. To me it’s what we were created for; it’s both bedrock and our goal. ... What I am suggesting is that the vision of **being in joy** is why we work for peace, justice or equality and respond to other people’s suffering. Driven by the memory of creative love in our own lives, we want to restore others to a condition where they might enjoy it too.”*

“Joy, not grit, is the hallmark of holy obedience. We need to be lighthearted in what we do to avoid taking ourselves too seriously. It is a cheerful revolt against self and pride. Our work is jubilant, carefree, merry. Utter abandonment to God is done freely and with celebration. And so I urge you to enjoy this ministry of self-surrender. Don’t push too hard. Hold this work lightly, joyfully.”

Richard Foster, 1981: *Freedom of Simplicity*

¹ The Swarthmore Lectureship was established in England in 1907 in memory of the home of Margaret Fox, wife of the founder of Quakerism, George Fox. Swarthmore Hall in Lancashire was always open to earnest seekers after the Truth. The Lectureship has a twofold purpose: first, to interpret to the members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) their message and mission; and secondly, to bring before the public the spirit, the aims and fundamental principles of Friends.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.”

The Holy Bible, Galatians 5:22.

“In the New Testament Testimonials joy appears as the characteristic mark of distinction of the Christian. It is the spontaneous result of being filled with the Holy Spirit and is among the main fruits of the Holy Spirit. Joy was the basic mood of congregational gatherings and was often expressed in exuberant jubilation; it has its origin in the recognition that the dominion of evil is already broken through the power of Christ, that death, devil and demons no longer possess any claim upon believers, and that the forces of forgiveness, reconciliation, and transfiguration are already effective in humankind. ... In Christian humour, freedom and joy are combined.”

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica 1989.

“All people – or maybe I should say nearly all people – want to be happy. We also – most of the time – want other people to be happy, contented, or – for those who prefer religious language – blessed. What we don’t want is for others to be happy at our expense, often forgetting that a lot of the time our happiness is bought at the expense of others. And so we get the golden rule: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Paul Oestreicher, 1987: The Shelley Lecture; text reported in the NZ Listener 6 June 1987.

**Weekends at the Quaker Settlement,
76 Virginia Road, Whanganui 4500:**

3-6 June – Queen’s Birthday Weekend

The traditional fun and work weekend.

Contact: Lyneke Onderwater,
<lyneke@orcon.net.nz>

**19-21 August – Personal Peace-making:
Respect and Safety within Quakers**

Facilitators: Respect and Safety Committee.
Contact: Allan Harvey <allan.harvey@xtra.co.nz>

**Yearly Meeting Gathering 2016 will be held at
St. Cuthbert’s College,
Market Road, Epsom, Auckland**

Friday 15 July to Monday 18 July.

**A preparation day will be held at the Mt. Eden
Meeting House on Thursday 17 July.**

**A registration form can be obtained from the
Quaker website: www.quaker.org.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.