

# Southern Africa Quaker News

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Issue 244

## Southern African Quaker News

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Please direct requests to:  
SAQNeditor@quakers.co.za

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for further information.

Design & layout by Liz Gowans  
[lizgowanspublishing@gmail.com](mailto:lizgowanspublishing@gmail.com)

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**Cover:** Dancing girl sculpture outside NAMDIA office, Klein Windhoek, Namibia (photo by Helen Vale)

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# Editorial

Yearly Meeting 2019 was held at the eMseni Retreat Centre near Benoni, and the first thing that struck me was all the flowers in the gardens of the Centre. And this is the first post-YM issue of the SAQN, and thus includes reflections on YM and the Richard Gush Lecture.

First to the Gush Lecture, delivered this year by Helen Vale, who reflected on her long involvement with Quakers – and it was a long address. But, as it conveniently falls in to four sections, the SAQN will carry it in four issues between now and the next YM in 2021.

One of the important issues that was discussed at YM was the timing of Yearly Meetings, and after much discussion it was agreed to meet every second year in January, with two Mid-Year Reps Meetings between them. A Meeting at Easter time just did not mesh with school holidays and the like.

In both Zimbabwe and South Africa political issues have been much at the forefront of the news, with huge economic problems in Zimbabwe and much political infighting in South Africa, following the recent elections. At the root of the infighting are the issues of corruption and of poor service delivery at all levels of government. This last issue is best stated as:

*The only index by which to judge a government or a way of life is by the quality of the people it acts upon. No matter how noble the objectives of a government, if it blurs decency and kindness, cheapens human life, and breeds ill will and suspicion -- it is an evil government.*

Eric Hoffer, philosopher and author  
(1902-1983)

Included in this issue are some 'afterthoughts' on *Equality* from Benonia Nyakunikwa, the theme for YM. George Ellis was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Rhodes University and his address to students is included. Also included is an article by Geoff Harrison on the advantages of demilitarising Lesotho, and Rory Short on 'Victimhood' which has an echo in the article on West Bank settlements by Colin Bartlett and David Jones, Friends for Milton Kenyes and regular visitors to Southern Africa.

As there are to be a further three issues of the SAQN between now and the next Yearly Meeting, I encourage Friends to don their thinking caps and write contributions for the SAQN: what are Friends involved in and how do they see the world around them. To this end I want to suggest a theme for the next issue, that of climate and environment.

Wouter Holleman





# YM 2019 – REFLECTIONS AND MEMORIES

## A Clerk's-eye view

*John Inglis*

*The Co-clerks for YM 2019 were John Inglis and Sipho Nsimbi. At the end of the gathering Justin Ellis joined Sipho as Co-clerk in place of John. John shares his memories and reflections in this supplement to the Epistle.*

My experience of YM 2019 – both the preparation and the gathering itself – was rich and rewarding. The YM gathering is a special event that brings together Friends of all ages from local meetings all over Southern Africa. (Happily, Friends from Botswana could join us this year.) Although there were some shortcomings in the planning, the positive, peace-minded and constructive outlook of Friends ensured that, over-all, this was a life-enriching experience for most.

### WHAT WAS DIFFERENT?

#### *Times*

We adjusted the timing of sessions to provide a little more time in the evenings, especially for the 7- and 15-minute talks which have been short-changed by time pressures in the past. This allowed a little less time for lunch and supper breaks, but Friends still found plenty of time to talk and catch up with each other.

#### *Preparation for the theme of Equality*

Local meetings had prepared for the theme well ahead of YM, so Friends came having given it a lot of

thought. Their ideas gave rise to the question: What can Quakers do to make a change in society? The session on key messages helped us to see how – in our meetings or as individuals – we can share our views with a wider public and speak truth to those who exercise power.

#### *Special Interest Groups*

This year all the SIGs were planned and scheduled in advance. There were ten SIGs offered in three sessions, so people had to choose; but having smaller groups provided more opportunity to participate in discussion.

#### *Consultations of Local Meetings with Elders and YM Clerks*

This was a new feature of YM, intended to enable the concerns of local meetings to be shared with experienced Friends. The sessions enabled communal reflection and discernment, and helped meetings work with some difficult challenges. The consultations were greatly valued and it was agreed that this process should be continued and improved at future gatherings.

#### *Celebrating Past Friends*

The testimonies to Friends who have died recently were followed by an activity honouring the legacy of others who have passed on. Everyone was invited to



share a memory of a Friend who had been important to them, and these tributes were pinned onto a board inside a large “Q”, where they could be read by all during the course of the gathering.

#### *Evaluation*

This year’s evaluation was a more detailed process which included plenary input on many aspects of the YM gathering. The summary meeting of Elders, Clerks and coordinators on the closing day also added to the evaluation process.

#### *Online planning meeting for FWCC 2023*

The LAC (Local Arrangements Committee) had an online meeting with Gretchen Castle, the first stage in planning for the international gathering in Durban scheduled for July 2023.

### **WHAT WORKED WELL?**

#### *Business sessions*

The number of sessions for Meeting for Worship for Business was reduced from eight to seven, aiming to reduce the tedium factor and provide more time for other activities. Pre-thought presentations on complex and sensitive topics led to focused and more informed discussion, making it easier to reach consensus. It was suggested that task groups could be used in future to workshop difficult topics so that a proposal, or at least a clear framework with options, can be presented to plenary. Two task groups were set up: one to develop a mandate for more ethical investment; and the other to review the allocation of funds for supporting Friends in need.

The Treasurer, Mark Povall, presented the Quaker finances in a new format which aligns with the formal financial statements, but is much easier to understand.

#### *The Children’s Programme*

This worked well because of the excellent and carefully conceived programme developed by Amanda Gibberd and Julie Machin. The theme, “Walking in the Light of God – Journeys” used the image of journeys to introduce the children to many of the basic ideas of Quaker life through a wide range of hands-on and interactive experiences. The kids had a ball AND grew in their understanding of what it means to be a Quaker.

#### *Visitors*

The gathering was enriched by the participation and contributions of a number of visitors. Jane Dawson,

from Britain YM, reinforced our learning about how to communicate effectively and consistently on social justice issues. She encouraged us to develop “Quaker positions” on issues such as equality/inequality. Colin Bartlett and David Jones from Milton Keynes shared their experiences of Palestine. Definate Mudzingwa from AFSC Zimbabwe talked about the peace building work of AFSC. And Carol Bower shared the new peace building initiatives of the Peace Centre, especially their training of hundreds of election monitors for South Africa’s May elections.

#### *Key messages for public communications*

Nancy Fee’s session and exercise on using key messages took us a step further in developing a public Quaker voice on issues of social justice, and especially on the need to promote greater equality. This led to the drafting of a letter from SAYM to all MPs and Members of the provincial Legislative Assemblies who would be elected in the South African elections in May 2019. The letter, encouraging them to apply the core Quaker principles in their decision making, was sent to all the newly elected members after the elections.

### **CHALLENGES**

#### *Young Friends’ Programme*

There was insufficient planning for the YF Programme, and some YFs couldn’t come until their schools closed. Those who were there made the most of the situation, and plans were made for YF camps in the next year and a half to focus on team building and service.

#### *Clash of YM dates with school terms*

The first two days of YM took place while some schools were still in session. This interfered with the beginning of the Children’s and YF programmes. This contributed to the decision to schedule gatherings for early January, when all schools are on holiday at the same time. Because of financial limitations, gatherings will take place only every second year.

#### *Punctuality*

Friends were often late for sessions, and attendance became thinner and thinner towards the end of the gathering, despite frequent reminders and energetic bell-ringing. This is a perennial problem, and I will be awed by anyone who can motivate consistent punctual attendance.

### *Coordination of all the programmes*

The Adults', Young Friends', and Children's programmes should be well coordinated with each other to make possible a rich, shared experience in which everyone feels nurtured and can grow through their interactions with Friends of all ages. If the YF and Children's programmes had been drafted well in advance it would have allowed for creative coordination with the Adults' programme.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS**

### *Minding the Oneness*

I treasure the strong sense I had of feeling supported in the role of clerk. This affirming vibe made YM a positive experience, and reinforced my sense that being a Quaker is the right choice in my spiritual search.

Friends' constructive approach made it possible for us to deal with difficult issues without being divisive.

I fear that the longer gaps between gatherings will cause us to lose some of the close connectedness that we experience at YM gatherings. This will make it even more important for local meetings to support the spiritual life of their members. Having MYRM every year will go some way to maintaining the links between meetings.

### *The Quaker Way*

The Worship Sharing groups and the Richard Gush Lecture each focused on the core Quaker testimonies. In my Worship Sharing group we saw how these values are all interconnected. For example, peace is not achievable where there is such gross inequality as exists in our region. As we explored these ideas

we deepened our relationships with known Friends and got to know new ones.

Helen Vale's Richard Gush Lecture was an inspiring overview of the foundations of the Quaker faith, showing how the testimonies have guided Quaker action at different moments in history. The testimonies are not doctrines set in stone, but guidelines that need to be reviewed and renewed as circumstances change. For example, a testimony on Stewardship/Sustainability has become more and more crucial in recent decades. Helen challenged us to suggest and discuss new testimonies that we should develop to guide us in the world of today and tomorrow.

## **MEMORABLE MOMENTS**

Among many memorable moments there were some that made this gathering stand out for me.

### *The Peace Centre*

It was a special pleasure to have Carol Bower join us for a few days, to hear her tell about the new peace initiatives of the Peace Centre, and to complete the lengthy process of reaching agreement about the future relationship between the Peace Centre and Quakers. The negotiations had been difficult for all, but a truthful process was sustained by a shared commitment to finding a resolution that would meet the needs of all parties and preserve our relationship as peace builders.

### *Vegetarian meals*

I was very touched by the readiness of the eMseni catering staff to meet our wishes for tasty vegetarian options on the menu. They willingly took up Nancy's





offer to share some vegetarian recipes in preparation for the gathering. The results tempted a number of carnivores to diversify their diet.

### *Singing*

Music was not as strong a part of our gathering as it has been in the past. But I was happy that it played an important role. I specially enjoyed the singing led by Bulawayo Friends and by Dudu Mtshazo in Meetings for Worship. Helen Vale ended her Richard Gush Lecture by asking us to sing "Lord of the Dance". And Rob Thomson's tiekie-draai accordion music got us singing and dancing during the Celebration. I would like to see music have a bigger part in future gatherings

### *Quakerly spirit in meetings*

As Clerk I specially appreciated the openness and respectful engagement of Friends during business sessions. I had the sense that, as a result, some real discernment took place, because discussions were not confrontational. The positive tone made it possible to hear different views and move towards a common position on various issues.

### *The Celebration*

I picture the children holding the stage with their energy and sense of fun, expressing themselves and feeling able to be themselves.

There was Katie, reminding us that the children had fun while the adults sat in business meetings, going "talk, talk, talk."

There was 4-year-old Sheldon doing cartwheels around the carpeted floor in the middle of the circle.

There was Daniel playing the bagpipes and then

leading all the children out at the end like a pied piper (except he was tartaned).

It was a happy and unified way to end the gathering.

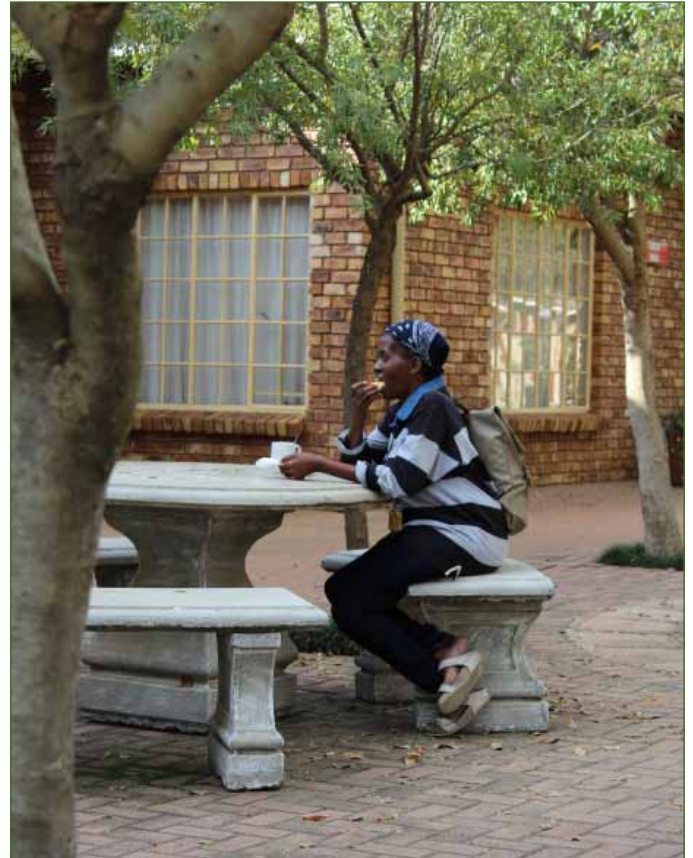
Clerking YM has given me a much deeper insight into the purpose and value of our gatherings, and how they should serve the interests and needs of all, regardless of age. I am grateful to so many Friends who have given their caring support and afforded me this rich experience.

















# 2019 GUSH LECTURE, PART 1

## Re-envisioning the Quaker testimonies in turbulent times: Seeking from the silence

*Helen Vale, Namibian Quaker Community*

*A seeker of silences am I, and what  
treasure I have found in silences that  
I may dispense with confidence?*

From *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran (1923)

### Dedication

I dedicate this lecture to the several faithful Friends from this Yearly Meeting who have died in the past three years and whom we miss so much – Rosemary Elliot (Eastern Cape), Jim McCloy (Lesotho), Gudrun Weeks (Botswana and USA), David Jobson (Zimbabwe and Pretoria), Shelagh Willet (Botswana) and John Schmid (Zimbabwe). Each of them illustrated the Quaker Advice ‘Let your life speak’, and four of them have given this same lecture: Rosemary Elliot in 1998, John Schmid in 2011, Gudrun Weeks in 2012 Shelagh Willet in 2013. So, I follow in illustrious footsteps!

### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to the Quaker Tapestry in UK for permission to use ten of their panels to illustrate this talk, and to Friends’ House in London for permission to use two of their posters which I found in the 2018 Quaker Peace Calendar. On a more personal note, I have to warmly thank Enid Ellis, my friend and Friend from Namibia Quaker Community, for her on-going practical support over the past seven months while I was compiling the lecture and for letting me bounce ideas off her.

### Introduction

Good Morning. Sanibonani. More. Dumelang. Mangwanani.

Many thanks to all of you for being here today. I feel honoured to have been asked to give the 2019 Richard Gush lecture, but also rather inadequate at the same time since I follow in the steps of so many weighty Friends. I think this is the 21st Richard Gush lecture.

I will start with an introduction to Richard Gush to



*Rob Thompson heralding Helen Vale*

remind you of why this lecture takes his name. Then I will give a brief introduction to myself and how Quakerism has been a constant thread throughout my life from age four to now – a period of 67 years – and how enriching that has been. [Part 1]

I have many interests, such as AVP, education and literature, and I have tried to incorporate elements of these in this lecture. I will look at our Quaker testimonies (SPICES or STEP depending on your preference) and since the theme of this year’s YM is Equality I have particularly focused on it in Part 2.

I go on to suggest two more potential testimonies, namely gratitude and creativity, as well as considering whether Quakerism is **more** than its testimonies and how the four concepts of faith in action, the inner light, silence and stillness are crucial. [Part 3]

Finally, I look briefly at the idea of ‘turbulent times’ and how Quakerism is vitally significant in how we live our lives and deal with its many challenges. I end on a positive note with an image from Namibia and a song. [Part 4]

Most sections are headed by an illustration, usually from the Quaker tapestry, and a quotation from a Friend, often taken from a previous Richard Gush lecture, or from one of the *Advices* or *Queries*. In fact, I have woven key quotations from 12 previous Richard Gush lectures into this presentation and

hopefully this provides a synthesis and appreciation of other Friends' insights.

I endeavour to be reflective, informative and thought-provoking and I hope there is at least one thing in this lecture that will 'speak' to each of you.

### Who was Richard Gush?

Many of you will remember when we had YM in Grahamstown in 2008 we went out and had meeting at Salem, home of Richard Gush, where we heard of his life (1789-1858) in a talk by Colin Steyn, and admitted Richard Gush to posthumous membership in the presence of several of his descendants. We listened to the Richard Gush Memorial Lecture, entitled *Turning the World Upside Down*, by Vernon Gibberd in the chapel that Gush had built. Richard Gush was a carpenter and builder, one of the 1820 British Settlers who, in 1834, courageously mediated a peaceful resolution between the amaXhosa and the settlers (YM Epistle 2008).

For more on Richard Gush I refer you to the *Life of Richard Gush – an African Emigrant*, printed and sold in 1860, only two years after his death, by Thomas Brady for the York Friends' Tract Association. It gives some fascinating details and is being put on the YM website.

### My Quaker background

It is only in preparing for this lecture over the past few months that I have come to realise how interwoven my life has been with individual Quakers and Quakerism, and the opportunities I have had to see Quaker work at first hand, particularly in my time at Quaker Peace and Service, Friends House, London over six years.

I am reminded of the words from the song *Tapestry* by Carol King:

*My life has been a tapestry of rich and royal hue  
An everlasting vision of the ever-changing view  
A wondrous woven magic in bits of blue and gold  
A tapestry to feel and see, impossible to hold...*

To start at the beginning. My family was not Quaker. I was taken to Quaker meeting in Church Road, Watford, Hertfordshire in England with my two sisters when I was about four by a sweet old Friend called Arthur Weeyms, who seemed ancient to me then, but could have been 65. We went there and back on the no. 142 red bus, and we left around 10 am to get there for 11. On reflection with my younger sister recently we think now that my parents just wanted

some peace on a Sunday morning! I can remember reading picture books for the first 10 minutes before going out to children's meeting, and my feet barely reaching the hassock. As I grew up I came to enjoy the quiet time. As a teenager I went on work camps over weekends, hitchhiking to the various places and camping on the floor of meeting houses. I also really enjoyed going to Luton and Leighton MM Quaker camps over about 15 years from age 11, and not washing properly for 10 days! The camaraderie, the dew on the grass, meetings for worship in the open air, being in nature, the friendships, table tennis, late night walks I really enjoyed, but not the tent inspection or the duty of 'cooks wash up.'

As I became an older teenager, I found that the Friends at meeting really impressed me in that they were sincere and committed to social concerns, practical in their social witness, were without hypocrisy or sophistication and did not preach. They



were open and loving to me, particularly two Friends who came to treat me like their daughter and became my mentors and second parents. There are people who come into your life at different stages and move you forward in some way. Bill and Muriel Frank were such people and to this day my best friend in UK is their daughter Ros. There is a coincidental link with our YM since Bill and Muriel were wardens at Johannesburg Meeting House in 1970-71. It was Muriel who was on the Africa Committee at Friends House, the administrative headquarters of Friends in Britain, who suggested to me that I might apply to be a Quaker volunteer and that she would give me a reference. I did so and the rest, as they say, is history.

So started my long relationship with Swaziland where, from October 1972 to September 1975, I





worked as a volunteer at Sebenta in Mbabane as bursar of the National Adult Literacy Programme. I fell in love with southern Africa and made several good Swazi friends along the way. In fact, I have just been in Swaziland for 10 days visiting some of those friends and it is now 47 years later! Altogether I have lived there for about 12 years at different times.

In 1979 when I was back in the UK, I was offered a job at Friends' House in London, and worked there for six years as administrative assistant to two dynamic and committed Quaker Peace and Service General Secretaries, Alun Davies first and then Cecil Evans. I worked on Quaker issues relating to east-west relationships, including the British Soviet social scientist series of seminars on human rights with British friend William Barton, instrumental in this initiative. We focused on the Middle East, Europe

and Northern Ireland. We also worked with the London Diplomats' Group, the Geneva Summer School, the European volunteer programme and the 1% Fund. This was both a privilege and an eye-opener and vastly expanded my understanding of Friends and of issues of peace, development and human rights, as well as how to give support to various Quaker committees. I had the opportunity to travel amongst Friends in Europe and UK and experience first-hand Quaker work in Brussels (Quaker Council for European Affairs, with Brian and Pat Stapleton, the first representatives), in Belfast (Quaker House with Billy and Joan Sinton as reps), in Geneva (Quaker United Nations Office with Kevin and Valerie Clements and Peter Herby and the Geneva Summer School) and in Austria (Ewald and Hamsa Eichler at Quaker House Vienna, and the volunteer programme in Austria).

It was during this time that I completed my Masters in African Studies part time at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Fortunately, SOAS was only a 7-minute walk from Friends' House.

I returned to southern Africa in 1985 taking up the post of Field Officer for International Voluntary Service in Swaziland, overseeing a programme of 28 volunteers. From there I moved to teaching literature at the University of Swaziland for four years and then to the University of Namibia in 1991 where I taught for 16 years. I continue to live in Namibia. In both Swaziland and Namibia I have been active with the small group of Friends.

***Part 2 will be published in SAQN Issue 245***



# Graduation Address, April 12th 2019, Rhodes University

*George F R Ellis, Cape Western Monthly Meeting*

I want to start by congratulating all the graduating students. You have worked hard and proved you can do well, and are receiving a degree which recognizes that you now have valuable specialist knowledge and abilities. You are an expert in some area of thought, and your degree certifies that this is the case. Congratulations on this achievement, and for persevering with all the commitment that this entails.

Your family and friends are proud of you for this achievement. A graduation is always a joyful occasion – you have finished one stage of life and are moving on to another, and this ceremony recognizes both your achievements and the transition you are making. Opportunities and possibilities are opening up before you, decisions will have to be made, life will be different from now on. It may be a bit intimidating but hopefully also exhilarating. It is a great step in life.

## **World class university**

I want to emphasize that you are being awarded your degrees by a world-class institution. What this means is that they will be recognised everywhere in this country, and indeed anywhere in the world. The degree has such value because of the status and recognition the university has achieved through the dedicated work of hundreds of academics and staff over the course of more than a century. They have built up an institution of real worth, whose imprimatur is on your degree certificates. This gives you access to many further opportunities both here and abroad. In my own case I was able to go to Cambridge and be accepted into a PhD program there because those at Cambridge knew my BSc degree from UCT was world class. Because of it, I have been able to contribute to the development of scientific knowledge in my own society and with research groups around the world. Treasure what it means to be awarded your degree from this institution and that your academic achievement will be recognised anywhere in the world, as well as by businesses and other institutions in South Africa.

The international recognition your degree will



receive is part of a significant theme: students from Africa, and in particular South Africa, can have the same success as students from anywhere in the world. In intellectual terms, we form part of a global community and can produce intellects and abilities that are amongst the best in the world. That is what this University and my own University stand for and are part of. Our graduates are equal to those in other parts of Africa, in India, England, the United States and France and Germany in every way. Let's rejoice in this worldwide connection and recognition.

This is particularly demonstrated through the PhDs that will be awarded today. The undergraduates here have demonstrated their depth of understanding of their subject, which is a great achievement, but a PhD is something more. Each PhD degree represents research work that has extended human knowledge to where no one has ever been before. Each graduating PhD student has become a world expert



in some specific area because they are at the cutting edge of creating new understanding that has never before existed in the history of the Earth. The whole PhD examination process by experts in your subject verifies that this is indeed so. You are trail-blazers in your topic, leading the way in human understanding, and you have tamed some part of the unknown. Human knowledge is a little bit greater now because of your work. It is a wonderful achievement.

You have, of course, built on the work of countless others that has created the amazing structure of human science and technology – a vast cooperative enterprise that has achieved extraordinary results such as aircraft and dams, iPhones and the internet. Isaac Newton said that he achieved what he did because he stood on the shoulders of giants. That is indeed true. But the extra point he did not say is that when he stood on the shoulders of giants, he then looked in the right direction! That capacity – to see where the new developments will arise, what is the direction that needs investigation and will produce new results – is at the heart of human creativity and achievement. Incidentally South Africa is a world leader in radio astronomy through the development of the Square Kilometer Array radio telescope in Carnarvon in the Karoo. Rhodes University has played a significant role in the development of that project.

### **Technical capacity**

You are graduating with degrees in science. This is a subject that has the ability to change the world. It is common in history to focus on rulers and their subjects, armies and battles, the rise and fall of empires - political leaders and political issues. These are of course important. But in the broader view of things, these are the users of what makes the deeper changes to human history. This, in a real sense is about the rise and use of science and technology. Let me illustrate by some specific example. Isaac Newton was the first to understand the laws of motion that govern how objects move. This underlies all engineering, such as the design of motor cars and aircraft, and will continue to be the foundation of mechanical engineering as long as we design and make them. James Clerk Maxwell discovered the way that electricity and magnetism work together to create light, and this led to the recognition of the possibility of radio signals and so the existence of radio and television, iPhones and GPS systems. This will continue to be the basis of radio technology for all time. He has transformed everyone's life. Alan

Turing worked out how general-purpose computers could be constructed and so laid the foundations for all digital computers and the huge revolution in our lives that that entailed. John Bardeen discovered how to make transistors and so laid the possibility for all the digital devices in the world today. Charlie Townes worked out the possibility of the laser, and so made the existence of CDs and DVDs possible, as well as transforming experimental physics and even parts of engineering. Alan Cormack worked out the theory of the CAT scanner and constructed the first working model of one at the University of Cape Town, transforming medicine forever: CAT scans, PET scans, and MRI scans are now a routine part of medicine and are transforming neuroscience. Grace Hopper transformed computing by developing the first compiler ever. It is because of her that you can enter easily understood commands on your computer, instead of having to tell it what to do in binary code – which is an almost impossible task. In each case (and many more I could mention) these discoveries were then adopted by all countries in all parts of the world, irrespective of their political systems or philosophical ideologies. They are the common property of all humanity and will remain so until life on Earth ceases. They are the truly transformative forces in society. An amazing local example is Siyabulela Xuza who began experimenting with rocket fuels in his mother's kitchen. This passion turned into a serious science project that culminated in him developing a cheaper and safer rocket fuel. Siya's science project won gold at the National Science Expo and the Dr Derek Gray Memorial award for the most prestigious project in South Africa. This led to an invitation to the International Youth Science Fair in Sweden in 2006, where he presented his project to the King and Queen of Sweden and attended the Nobel prize ceremony in Stockholm. Xuza's field of expertise is energy storage and he is currently developing a sustainable model for energy storage based on micro fuel cells in South Africa. He says "I'm motivated not by material things but by achieving significance." His long-term goals centre on creating his own energy solution company, something he says will help harness Africa's potential in the energy economy.

So, as you go out and enter your new life, be creative: imagine what can be done, work out how to do it, make it happen. You have the power to make a real difference at either a fundamental level, or in the applications of what we know to society around us. Treasure that opportunity and use it.

## **Values: what is worth doing**

But as well as developing and using your technical capacity, what matters crucially are your values as you lead your lives. What contribution you will make will depend on the values that underlie your work and your life. There are two specific issues I want to mention in this regard.

Firstly, there is the basic issue of the direction one's life takes. Martin Luther King said:

"An individual has not started living until he or she can rise above the narrow confines of his or her individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity. Every person must decide whether he or she will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness. Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?"

In the end there is only one real question facing us: are we living our lives just for ourselves, or for the common good? Are we concerned just with our own welfare, or with the welfare of others?

This is the key individual choice we all make: to live selfish or selfless lives. And if we choose just to work for our own welfare, we won't contribute to making this country a better place. We won't be playing the role we ought to in making South Africa a place worth living in for everyone.

Secondly, this issue arises also in societies and in the world at large. Globally we are experiencing a crisis of rising anger and resentment. Inequality and cultural differences are leading to group conflicts based in polarisation and the idea of us against them, leading to devaluing the other and, in extreme cases, to xenophobia. We are staring into an abyss of conflict and destruction as sectional interests divide us and generate hatred and fear. You have to choose where you stand in facing this situation, and how it will work out in your working life. Your actions will make a difference. The future of this country in particular depends on a values renewal in public life: the need for a change to a spirit of caring for others, caring for the poor and valuing the humanity of all. This is indeed taking place in many cases, many individual actions and wonderful NGO projects across the country, but it is often not the spirit of the country at large where many people are sowing division: telling people it's us against them.

We are all in this together in South Africa, and the challenge now is for us to resist stereotyping as we challenge inequality. We will do this if we give one another the chance to be part of the change for the better for all, rather than working against

groups we designate as outsiders, for whatever reason. We each have one life and one chance to do something worth doing, and it is crucial in creating a better life for all that we rise above the temptation to stereotype, treating everyone around us with respect and dignity, no matter what group they belong to, insisting on our common interests and common humanity. Following the clarion call by Bishop Tutu, we must resist denying anyone's humanity, or demeaning them: while not tolerating racism and other prejudice, we must still see the common humanity of each of us, as is so beautifully entailed in the traditional African spirit of Ubuntu. Then we will be building a country worth living in.

## **Understanding context**

We must of course do this with a sound understanding of the context in which we live: of being part of Africa but also part of the wider world, contributing to and benefiting from both. And we must understand our South African historical context of achievement and failures, of repression and struggle, as well as its present context of inequality and possibility which is the challenge we face.

As to this history, there is just one thing I wish to say. The struggle against Apartheid had many aspects, carried out by a variety of people. I think it should be better known that UCT and WITS and Rhodes are part of a strong tradition of resisting injustice, with students and staff having stood up against Apartheid for decades. Yes, they were largely restricted to White students but that was forced on them by the Government against their will: they were not anti-black, as some have stated. I remember clearly marching through Cape Town with thousands of UCT staff and students to protest the Separate Education Bill; the way UCT struggled to admit black students using various stratagems; the introduction of mixed residences when it was still not allowed by Government policy. I also remember UCT students protesting on de Waal Drive about police brutality, with a police helicopter hovering overhead, police sharpshooters on the roof of the Kramer building, and teargas rising over the maths building as the riot police charged up the steps to disperse protesting students. Many of us fought to oppose Apartheid in different ways, and were hated by the Government of the time for that reason.

As to the present, we are a country in a state of crisis because of massive poverty and inequality, a dysfunctional school system, massive corruption in the public sphere, and the undermining of public



institutions for sectional interests and to protect corruption. We face a significant housing and employment crisis, which need urgent action. And we are in much pain and anger about this situation. This is the context in which you will be working and seeing what you can do.

### Constructive way forward

Despite these negatives, we are also in a country of possibility.

As I have suggested, the country needs a renaissance of sound values in public life, resisting corruption, working for the common good; recognising hurt and poverty and inequality, working to counteract these baleful residues of the past; and supporting those working to create the values needed for a better life,

often at considerable cost. As well as your technical role, there is an important role to be played in building up a country that can work economically and socially. The creative challenge is to see how to do this.

I will make just one comment here. It has always been my experience that in working together on a joint project with people of integrity and good will, 'race', religion, and gender become irrelevant. A spirit of good humour, tolerance, respect and problem solving is possible, and does happen when people trust one another's integrity and work together for the good of the whole. I wish you all well as you make your way into the future. You have the ability to make a sound contribution to correcting what is wrong in society and improving life for all.

We value **integrity** but there is no place for conscience in our economic system.

We value **simplicity** but we are told that our role is to consume more and more.

We value **equality** but our economic system is drive toward increasing inequality.

We value **community** but we are told to act as individuals, and people on the margins are discarded.

We value **stewardship**, yet we're running through the Earth's resources at an alarming rate.

We value **peace**, but the economy is creating more destruction than any war ever has.

from Pamela Haines' *QuakerSpeak* talk

## Yearly meeting topic of discussion 'Equality' — some afterthoughts

### *Benonia Nyakunikwa, Harare Monthly Meeting*

*We, members of Harare Monthly Meeting, brainstormed this topic after Yearly Meeting, and here are some of our thoughts.*

The definition of equality: the state of being equal, especially in status, rights or opportunity — non-discrimination. The equal treatment of people irrespective of differences in culture or social standing.

We should be guided by the Christian injunction, to 'do unto others as you would like them do unto you.' Life is the way we treat each other.

The systems that Man creates makes equality difficult to practise in most areas of life. People are divided on lines of inequality. We are clustered according to rank, degree, value or ability. Thus we have classes, the *Haves* and the *Have Nots*.

Equality practised would bring peace amongst people. But, alas, we are such hypocrites, we say one good thing, while we do the opposite. Equality demands honesty, humility, respect, integrity and soul searching. It is not selfish, cruel, forceful, corrosive, corrupt, or bullish behaviour. It is not the abuse of others. It is not the unfair distribution of resources. All of these are the areas for concern, which we should address for the purpose of creating harmony. Equal opportunities should be open to all according to ability.

Real, final equality is when we come to the end of this human life to find that 'there is that of God in each and every one of us'. The Lord speaks to each and every one's condition. At the end of this Earthly life, we will be judged by our deeds. So the challenge is on us, on how we each treat other.

# Truth, absolute, relative, and victimhood

Rory Short, Quaker Community in Johannesburg

*"In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."*

Thessalonians ch 5 v 18

**Truth** is most often used to mean a) being in accord with fact or reality, or b) fidelity to an original or standard. What about **untruth**?

Our need to distinguish between truth and untruth arises from the fact that our thoughts, although they have a reality in themselves are representations of other things and are not and cannot be the other things. However, because they are representations they can be either better representations, i.e. closer to the truth, or poorer representations, i.e. further from the truth, until ultimately they become untruths.

How do we distinguish between truth and untruth?

At a physiological level we have evolved with five different sense organs: sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. These give us information about the world around us and enable us to automatically verify the representational quality of a thought through messages received from our senses. Consequently, all our thoughts, because they are but representations, are relative in their relation to what they represent and thus may be closer to it, i.e. the truth, or further from it, i.e. untrue.

For example, when we see a person, we don't doubt that we've seen the person: that is the truth, but we might be uncertain about who the person is exactly and need further information from our sense organs in order to be able to say it is Joe or Mary etc... Once that has happened, we again feel that we have the truth about the person. But, in our heads, we are still only handling a representation of the person, not the person themselves.

Some thoughts have no link to any of our five sense organs. God, for example, cannot be sensed by any of them. But based on Quaker and others' experience it is possible to sense through our conscious minds something greater than ourselves which we call God. This is an inner experience which cannot be corroborated by our five senses. Nevertheless, when it is inwardly experienced the truth of the experience is, in my mind and those of others, more certain than if it was being confirmed by a message from one of our senses.

## What are **beliefs**?

Beliefs are just thoughts which carry a significant emotional investment, by their thinker, in their truth. A belief is just a thought with emotion attached to it. Thus, beliefs and truths are inter-related but are not the same thing. Beliefs, as thoughts, may or may not be true. This is so, no matter how much we want to believe in them. Be that as it may, our beliefs are very important to us because we use them to navigate our way around the world, and it is thus very important that they reflect the truth of what is. If they don't, then when we use them as navigational aids they can cause harm to us and/or to others. Armed with this understanding of thoughts, beliefs, truths and untruths we can now turn to investigating the significance of **Relative Truth** and **Absolute Truth**.

Absolute Truth is what is. It can only be experienced directly, that is, without the intervention of our habitual mental filters. These automatically conceptualise our experiences, i.e. relativise them. There is an evolutionary reason for this: it increases our moment-to-moment chances of survival in the midst of the hazards of this world. Because the filters are habitual, however, it is difficult for us to consciously suspend them, but it is not impossible. Quaker Meeting for Worship is founded on their suspension. This happens when we withdraw from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, fall into a reverent silence and let our minds be drawn towards the unknown.

Also, because of our conceptual filters, we normally operate, not from direct experience but from filtered experience, i.e. in a relative space, and it is of course in this space where we find Relative Truth. Whilst we are experiencing life through our filters, Relative Truth is as close as we can get to the Absolute Truth. Acting according to beliefs, not reflecting Absolute Truth, is bound to cause us problems. Such actions will only increase suffering, not decrease it.

Now to **victimhood**. A belief in the reality of victimhood is endemic in South Africa. So how does victimhood fit within this understanding of Absolute and Relative Truth?

Life just is. That is the Absolute Truth. That we are born is another Absolute Truth. That we are conscious beings is another Absolute Truth. That the



conditions into which we are born are uncertain is another Absolute Truth and another Absolute Truth is, because we are conscious beings, we can choose how we respond to the conditions into which we are born.

Victimhood is a belief in a Relative Truth because it is not based on, or reflective of, an Absolute Truth.

The Absolute Truth is that whatever the conditions we are born into, we can choose to respond to them by saying 'this is just how it is', and get on with our lives as best we can, or we can choose to be a victim of past circumstances, saying (and believing) that because of them there is nothing we can do going forward. In other words, our life in the future is totally determined by our past.

If we take this latter choice we are basically saying, I'm helpless, and putting the responsibility for taking any action in the future onto somebody else. That somebody else depends on who we view as being responsible for our past conditions, either God or another human being. In other words, we give up our own agency. The causative factors of our life's circumstances should really have no bearing on how we respond to these circumstances in the here and now.

However some of us choose to let the causative factors have a bearing on how we respond to our circumstances and this is particularly easy to do if the circumstances are clearly created by our fellow beings. This situation apparently justifies, in our and others' minds, giving up our self-agency.

Apartheid was created by humans and designed by them to disadvantage black people. Consequently it provided an ideal opportunity, for those black people who wanted to take it, to give up their agency and become victims. Such a choice is made much easier

if there are many others who share a belief in the reality of victimhood. This was the case here.

The unfortunate consequences that flow from giving up one's agency are endless. I explain one of them here.

First, you become highly manipulable. Politicians exploit this by offering the victims policies and positions which support victimhood. AA, BEE and related legislation and regulations as well as the proposed EWC all fall into this category. Such legislation, aimed at fixing a situation, i.e. victimhood, that is not based on Absolute Truth, inevitably has negative consequences. It only increases suffering rather than lessening it. It has driven non-black, skilled people out of the country to the detriment of the economy. Thus it has decreased the skills available in our economy, skills that would normally have been expressed and generated employment. It has also meant that many services normally supplied by government are either degraded or have, to all intents and purposes, ceased operating.

To close, I listened on SAFM one day to a black South African cyclist who was competing in the Tour de France. From the way he spoke he was clearly not a victim. He had had a rough start to his life, which part of the interview I missed, but what interested me was how the interviewer tried to make a big thing of his rough start in life by repeatedly asking him if it had played a role in how people in the cycling world had responded to him. His response was that it was actually irrelevant, he had just got on with achieving whatever he could by working at refining whatever abilities that he possessed.

South Africans must give up seeing themselves as victims of Apartheid otherwise we, as a nation, will never jump off the scrap heap of history.



# How Lesotho could abandon its army and put the money to better use

*Geoff Harris, KZN Monthly Meeting*

Lesotho allocated USD\$52.6 million (Maloti 698 million) to its military in 2017 – or 3.9% of government expenditure. This is a figure that has doubled in real terms since 2008. By any standards – and particularly for a country as impoverished as Lesotho – this is an indefensible amount of money.

The case for demilitarising the tiny country of over 2.2 million is threefold.

First, Lesotho's military serves no significant security function. The country is completely surrounded by South Africa, one of Africa's military superpowers that spends almost 70 times more on its military. It would easily overwhelm the Lesotho Defence Force, which has just 3000 soldiers.

Second, from its inception, the Lesotho military has interfered with democratic processes and engaged in human rights abuses. Historically, it has been used by the government to thwart political opposition. In 1986, of its own volition, it staged a coup and took over political power. In April 1994, a group of soldiers took four government ministers hostage, and killed the deputy prime minister. And in August 2014, the military attempted another coup, but failed.

Third, the country's poverty levels and poor socio-economic indicators mean that government's budgetary resources must be allocated with particular care. Almost 60% of its population earns less than USD\$1.90 a day. At the same time, Lesotho ranks 159th of the 189 countries on the UNDP's Human Development Index.

Attempts to reform the Lesotho military in the past have come to naught. I believe that there is a strong case for Lesotho to demilitarise completely i.e. to disband the Lesotho Defence Force.

## **The case for not having an army**

Can a country exist without a military? The simple answer is yes: according to America's Central Intelligence Agency, there are 36 nations without a regular army although sometimes their police act as de facto military forces.

Take Costa Rica, for example. It's a country of 5 million people, which demilitarised in 1948 following a civil war. For decades, the country has

been a haven of peace, democracy and prosperity in a region bedeviled by violence and insecurity. In terms of various international indices, it is far ahead of its neighbouring countries. The fact that it doesn't spend on a military has enabled much higher allocations to areas like education and health.

There are five requirements that are necessary for a successful demilitarisation. These are:

- widespread acceptance by citizens,
- willingness by political leaders to make the decision,
- a detailed plan,
- an implementing agency such as a ministry of peace, and
- adequate financing.

Each of these is very important. My focus here is on the money it would take for Lesotho to demilitarise.

## **Financing demilitarisation**

Compensating former soldiers is a necessary investment in order to successfully demilitarise. Compensation of personnel in Lesotho's military for their loss of employment would have to meet the requirements of Lesotho's Labour Code Order, which stipulates a severance payment equivalent to two week's wages for each completed year of continuous service. This would cost USD\$12.1 million (M152 million).

A more generous approach would be to pay the equivalent of, say, two years of their gross income. This would cost USD\$59.3 million (M789 million). Both these amounts would need to be funded by donors.

## **Fighting poverty at the same time**

I propose that the money saved by disbanding the Lesotho Defence Force be linked to a basic income grant payable to all adult citizens. This would mitigate economic uncertainty, which is the predominant source of insecurity in any country.

Evidence from recent reviews of grant-related programmes worldwide shows that cash transfers – like basic income grants – result in improved health and education and lead to higher incomes in the long



term. They are not used for wasteful expenditures like alcohol and gambling to any extent.

Data from the Lesotho's Household Budget Survey estimated the country's average income – for almost 95% of households – to be USD\$346 (M4 853) per annum. What if the USD\$53 million (M698 million) currently spent on the military was allocated instead to all adult citizens?

Assuming two adults per household, the average household income for these households would increase by almost 20 per cent to USD\$68 (M954) per annum. It should also be noted that a considerable proportion of both payouts to the military, and Lesotho's adult citizenry, will come back to the government in the form of taxation.

### In conclusion

Some important questions remain. In particular, whether a 20% increase in average household income for 95% of households would be enough to persuade the government and citizens of Lesotho to support demilitarisation.

It's also uncertain whether the military personnel would be satisfied with the payout scenarios as proposed. And of utmost importance is political goodwill. The programmes I have suggested will only succeed with the support of Lesotho's government.

**Previously published in *The Conversation*, November 11, 2018**

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## What can be done about the impending invasion of Iran?

*Geoff Harris, International Centre of Nonviolence, KZN Monthly Meeting*

I am afraid – very afraid – that the United States is preparing for a war with Iran. When I look at the unmitigated disaster the 2003 invasion of Iraq has caused to the region, the prospect of some similar action against Iran appals me.

Why do I think that an invasion of Iraq is on the cards? I refer to a phrase which celebrity psychologist Dr Phil often uses – 'the best guide to future behaviour is relevant past behaviour'. The relevant past behaviour in this case has two components.

First, there is the sheer number of times the US has 'intervened' militarily in other countries since the end of WW2. As William Blum<sup>i</sup> and others<sup>ii</sup> have documented, there have been well over 50 such interventions, beginning with China in 1945 and continuing to the present day.

What led to these interventions? Blum explains that in almost every case it was not because of the

country's anti-American sentiments. Rather, it was because it had shown signs of self-determination – 'the desire ... to pursue a path of development independent of US foreign policy objectives'.<sup>iii</sup> Just wishing for neutrality and non-alignment with any super-power was more than enough justification for the US to intervene.

The second element of past behaviour concerns the way these interventions, particularly the major invasions, came about. Vietnam and Iraq are the best known examples. In 1967, the US tried to provoke North Vietnam into military action which could be used to justify a major expansion of the US war effort. North Vietnam was careful not to respond to such provocation, so Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara blatantly lied to President Johnson about a non-existent naval encounter in the Gulf of Tonkin.<sup>iv</sup> The President, impatient to be seen as decisive during an election campaign, swallowed the bait and the Vietnam War began in earnest. After 50 000 US soldiers, 1.4 million Vietnamese combatants and perhaps two million civilian deaths, the US pulled out of South Vietnam, which promptly

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i Blum, W. 2014. Killing hope. US military and CIA interventions since World War II. Updated edition. London: Zed Books.

ii Keylor, W. 2009. A world of nations: the international order since 1945. 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press; Litwak, R. 2007. Regime change: US strategy through the prism of 9/11. Washington, DC/Baltimore, MD: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/The Johns Hopkins University Press.

iii Blum, op cit, p. 12.

iv Hastings, M. 2018. Vietnam. An epic tragedy 1945–1975. London: William Collins, pp. 189–193.

fell to North Vietnamese forces.

The decision to invade Iraq was also based on lies. First, someone – guilty or not – had to be punished for the attack on the Twin Towers on September 11, 1999 and, even though there was no credible evidence of any Al Qaeda-Iraq link, Iraq seemed like a good candidate. Second, there was the continued allegation that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, despite extremely credible evidence to the contrary provided by United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission. Based on fabricated evidence, including that presented by Secretary of State Colin Powell to the UN Security Council, President George W. Bush ordered the invasion which began in March, 2003. The war was soon over, with minimal US casualties but the resultant civil wars in Iraq and Syria have killed hundreds of thousands of civilians, displaced and traumatised millions more and multiplied the number of terrorists intent in harming the US and its allies. These consequences are continuing 16 years after the invasion and, now that the genie of violence is out of the bottle, will continue for decades more.

A frightening feature of these two examples, and many of the others documented by Blum, is a US President who is willing to believe and act on the advice of one or two key advisors rather than that of his own intelligence agencies or respected international agencies. Does this sound like anyone we know?

In fact, the track record shows that US military interventions have largely failed to achieve their objective of installing regimes which are friendly to US interests. And in most cases, US invasions and US-backed coups 'have led to severe repression, disappearances, extra-judicial executions, torture, corruption, and prolonged setbacks for the democratic aspirations of ordinary people'.<sup>v</sup>

In addition, and contrary to popular belief, in the 20th century, nonviolent efforts were far more effective than violence in bringing about major changes such as overthrowing regimes, expelling foreign occupiers and secession.<sup>vi</sup>

Given this, what advice can be offered from a nonviolence perspective to the parties involved in the likely US invasion of Iran? Given that there is no way Iran could withstand a concerted attack from

the US, there is no point in it maintaining a large military to deter such an attack. My advice to Iran is a radical one – to reduce its military capacity by half in a very public way by closing military bases, demobilising soldiers and decommissioning naval vessels and aircraft. At the same time, it should advise the world that in the event of a US invasion, it will not resist. This will disconcert the US to such an extent that an invasion – of a country which will not resist – will become far less likely. There is a risk in doing this, of course, but I believe it is far less than allowing the present trajectory to continue.

The resources saved can be reallocated to issues such as combatting climate change and providing non-military assistance, without strings attached, to poorer countries in the region, especially those dealing with huge numbers of refugees. This fits closely with Islamic principles and would raise Iran's regional and international status.

I would ask the United States to recognise that military interventions go against the very principles of freedom and truth on which the country is said to be based. This means, to paraphrase Gandhi, that the US needs to demonstrate by its actions the sort of world order it wants to encourage. One way to do this would be to join international efforts against the biggest threat to humankind – climate change – financed by significant cuts in military expenditure, the size of which dwarfs those of all its potential enemies combined.

Finally, I would urge other countries to take the risk of encouraging the US, over and over again, to behave better as global citizen.

**These are extraordinary  
times. And they're  
dangerous times. But  
here's the good news.  
We have the chance,  
not the certainty but the  
chance, to restore some  
semblance of sanity to  
our politics.**

**– Barack Obama**

v Swanson, D. 2016. War is a lie. 2nd edition. Charlottesville, VA: Just World Books, p. 30.

vi Chenoweth, E. and Stephan, M. 2011. Why civil resistance works. The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict. Columbia, NY: Columbia University Press.



31 Sherwood  
219 Helen Joseph Road  
Glenwood 4001  
6 June 2019

The Ambassador  
US Embassy  
Pretoria

Dear Ambassador

We observe the escalation of actions and threats by the United States against Iran with great alarm.

The consequences of the invasion of Iraq for the region have been disastrous for the people of that country and for the region. And it has greatly expanded the terrorist threat facing the US. This was all predictable. It is yet more evidence that violence does not bring about peace; rather, it begets more violence.

The American Quaker William Penn, writing in 1693, offers advice which we urge your government to take:

*A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come of it ... We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive or gain by love and information... Let us then try what Love will do; for if men did once see we love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains and he that forgives first, wins the laurel.*

Kind regards

Geoff Harris  
Clerk  
Durban Quaker Meeting

## The Tent of Nations: Witness to non-violence in Palestine

*Colin Bartlett and David Jones, Milton Keynes Meeting*

In October 2018 David and I travelled to Palestine-Israel as part of a small Quaker Voluntary Association (QVA) working retreat for two weeks. During that time we stayed with a Palestinian Christian family in the village of Jifna in the West Bank and we worked alongside local farmers helping with their olive harvest, our presence there acting as a deterrent to Israeli settlers intending to carry out any raids. We

visited Jelazone refugee camp outside Ramallah, the capital of Palestine. The camp has been home to more than 9000 exiled Palestinians from the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. During our stay we met peace activists, teachers, students, business people, and NGOs who told us their stories of life under Israeli occupation. One of the most remarkable people we met was Jean Zaru, the ex-Clerk of Ramallah Friends



*Colin Bartlet and David Jones at YM 2019*

Meeting. Her response to Israeli claims that they are only taking back land given to them thousands of years ago by God is “God is not a real estate agent - why would He take land from one nation and give it to another”. Everywhere we went through the West Bank, people welcomed us and wanted to tell their stories. They feel that the West has forgotten them and asked us to tell their stories when we got home. This is one such story.

Whilst staying in Jerusalem, we made a journey by bus to the Tent of Nations hilltop farm, south west of Bethlehem. It is owned by the Nassar family, Palestinian Christians who have lived there since 1919. The land was originally bought by their grandfather from the Ottomans. After the Turks left, they have had the land deeds validated under successive administrations of Jordan, Britain and Israel. But in 1991 Israel refused to recognise their ownership saying that it belonged to the state of Israel.

The family took their claim to the Military Court

— Zone C is the part of Palestine that is under Israeli military occupation. For 12 years Israel fought the case in court and lost. Legal battles with the Israelis have been going for 27 years, during which time they applied various physical strategies to evict the Nassar family from the farm.

The farm is surrounded by five Israeli Settlements. The Settlements are built on Palestinian land gained through forced demolition of homes and confiscation of land. Israeli Settlers damaged 250 fruit trees on the farm and threatened the lives of the family. A UK-based Jewish organisation heard about the damage and immediately provided funds to the family to replant all 250 trees. After that, Israel placed a demolition order on the farm’s trees and military earthmoving vehicles moved onto the land to destroy the new trees. The Jewish Centre for Non-Violence in the US subsequently assisted the family to replace the trees. Recently Israel offered the family a blank cheque to leave the farm.

We spent the day on the farm with members of the family and volunteers from around the world who come to help. We were amazed by the degree of resilience to which the family remain positive and undaunted despite the threats and violence. They have opened up the farm as an educational centre to both Palestinian and Israeli students.

We were shown the caves that were built in response to the order by Israelis that no Palestinians in Zone C were to build structures above ground. There are prefab buildings above ground on the farm but they can survive for long periods of time in the caves in the event of an attack by the local Israeli Settlers or military.

In Zone C Palestinian properties may not be connected to the electricity grid or water supply. With funding from various Western donors, the family are completely self-sufficient. Solar panels charge an array of batteries which in turn supply electricity day and night. Rainwater runs off the roof of the main building and is collected in large underground storage tanks to provide drinking water and water for washing.

Daoud Nassar gave us a talk during the afternoon about the strategy the family has adopted for survival. He said that no hope and the violence of the Israeli state has pushed ordinary Palestinians to the limit. He explained that the first response under these circumstances is violence. But his family does not believe in violence. The next response is to sit down and cry at the lack of Palestinian leadership



— and to wait. He said that such a response leads to a mentality of victimhood and that is not what his family is about either. The third response is to run away, to leave, to give up. But the Nassar family refuse to leave. He says that there has to be another way, a fourth way which he defines as the refusal to hate and not to have enemies. They prefer to invest their negative energy in a positive way. Challenges are not obstacles. As an example, he gave their response to the Israeli refusal to allow them electricity or water. The alternative sources of energy and water have saved them money in the long run. The underground buildings have been cheaper.

The Tent of Nations wants to promote a message of hope. They hold summer camps with art, music and theatre for young people. A Women's Empowerment programme is held on the farm. Education programmes bring school children to the farm to learn about sustainable farming and energy.

Short- and long-term volunteers from abroad are welcomed.

Since 2002 there have been no attacks from the Israeli Settlements. This is a remarkable achievement and a living embodiment of the Quaker testimonies. The effect on their Palestinian neighbours has been nothing short of a miracle. When Tent of Nations began its refusal to hate and to open up the farm to visitors on both sides of the dispute, the neighbouring farmers laughed and said that it would never work. But as work has progressed, the neighbours have come back to ask how they can become involved in similar work.

Tent of Nations is a beacon of light shining through the darkness of despair and lack of hope that a political solution will be found to the conflict in the region. Our lives have been enriched by their example.



*Map showing location of Tent of Nations*



*Entrance to Tent of Nations.*



*Main farm building with solar panel array*



*View of Nahalin - one of five Israeli settlements surrounding Tent of Nations*



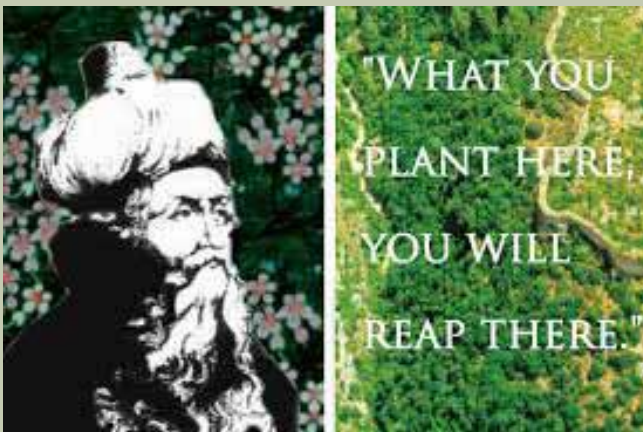
*Our group with Daoud Nassar in the underground classroom*



*The family can survive for months in this cave*



*Rain water runs off into large underground storage tanks*



## THE RELIGION OF LOVE

*Ibn Arabi, 1160-1240 CE,  
Cordoba, Al-Andalus (now Spain)*

My heart can take on any form:  
A pasture for gazelles,  
A cloister for the Christian monks,  
For pagan idols, sacred ground,  
The holy Ka'ba for the pilgrim  
The scrolls of the Torah  
And the pages of the Qur'an.  
Mine is the religion of love:  
Wherever its caravans turn,  
There I will find my creed.