



SPARK

New York Yearly Meeting

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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January 2021

Another World is Possible

What does the world we want to live in look like? Do we have to change what we do, or how we think? Or both? What is necessary from us to make what we imagine possible; in our meetings, in our lives or in our witness work?

*This issue was guest-edited by the **Another World is Possible Working Group** of the Witness Coordinating Committee.*

Re-Imagining Our World

Rebekah Rice
Saratoga Meeting

Imagine our grandchildren living with gratitude for the abundance that surrounds them, with gratitude for fresh air and water, with gratitude for the plants and medicinal plants, with gratitude for two-leggeds and four-leggeds, six-leggeds and eight-leggeds and winged friends. Imagine our grandchildren living with gratitude to earth and sun and moon and stars, to the ancestors of the past and of the future, to the teachers of

all times and places. Imagine the celebrations of all our relations, of all people everywhere. Imagine that world where everyone has delicious food and beautiful shelter and health and well-being.

Is it possible now?

I want to live in a world where everyone has love and food and shelter and access to healing. I want to live in a world where everyone has time to create art and music if they want to; where everyone has some space to grow plants that are beautiful or healing or nourishing; where everyone has access to learning the skills they want to learn; where everyone can feel gratitude for this earth, for their community, for the abundance that surrounds them, and where nothing is wasted.

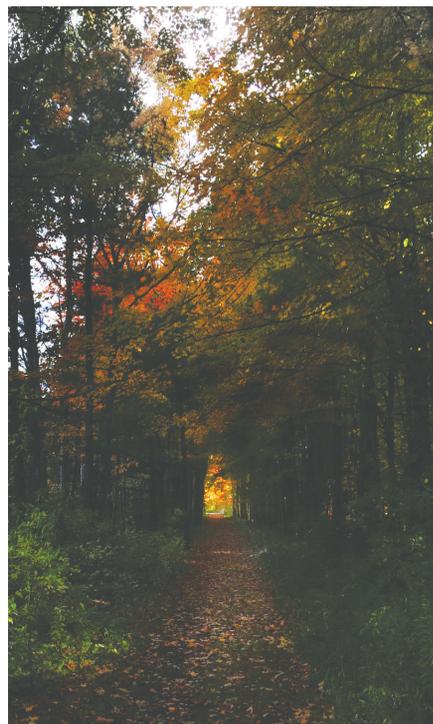


Photo by Geoffrey Navias

A Better World IS Possible

Frederick Drew Robinson

Otisville Worship Group

It is generally believed amidst the chaos and cares of the world that the resolution of strife and discord is impossible, that it is systemic and therefore immune to the force of change. One's concern may be that individual action to bring about change is futile. It can be discouraging to view longstanding problems that affect the human condition and realize that at their root are institutional and social structures which reinforce their influence in our lives.

But what of the possible? What of those things which are within our limitless capacity and abilities? The stuff of dreams for the future, the cultivation of hope? It requires personal as well as collective power, courage, and determination to bring about a new way to direct our best efforts toward the realization of a better world.

From the beginning of time there has been the belief that a better world is possible. Without this firm conviction there can be no achievement in the improvement of the human condition. Progress is not a

continued on page 4

Imagine.

Shirley Way
Ithaca Meeting

We are meant to enjoy life. This Life is a gift. To not appreciate the Gift, to not honor it, is to turn from God.

It has sometimes been a chore, these past months, to remember the Gift and to free the heaviness in my heart. It can be too much to take in: the deeply entrenched worldwide injustices on so many levels—economic, racial, environmental, social—the earth careening from the effects of climate change, the understanding that we can only expect it to get much worse.

I must remind myself that it is not my work to fix it, and that to believe I could would be arrogant and misguided. Neither am I allowed to turn away. It is my work to discern what is mine to do. And

continued on page 5

Our Spiritual Crisis

Liseli Haines
Mohawk Valley Meeting

When I was 15 years old, I was living in Kenya with my parents and younger brother, home schooling; a year of freedom, being mostly by myself, schooling myself, with time to think and time to dream. One day I opened the back door to go outside. The view out my back door

continued on page 4

Listening to Stories, to Divine

Cai Quirk
Ithaca Meeting

There are many ways of knowing. Some of them interact well with others and some are more like oil and water, coexisting but separate, not mixing as easily. What do we lose when modern American culture centers more on fact and reason, often dismissing metaphors,

continued on page 4

Another World is Possible pages 3-8

Upcoming NYM Sessions page 8

Notices

Deaths

Bethea Brice, member of Poplar Ridge, on March 11, 2020.
Lawrence J. Coulthurst, member of Rahway-Plainfield, on December 11 2020.

NEWS

NYYM Prayer List

A Prayer List is sent out periodically by email to subscribers offering the names of Friends who have asked to be prayed for, or of loved ones for whom Friends have requested prayer. Consider being a recipient of prayer, and/or subscribe to offer intercessional prayer by contacting prayerlist@nyym.org.

Sojourn at Powell House

The larger building at the Powell House retreat center, Pitt Hall, is now available to be rented, including the use of its kitchen and common spaces as well as specific bedrooms and bathrooms for your group. For details visit www.powellhouse.org/sojourn-at-poho or call 518-794-8811.

Join the Inside-Outside Letter Writing Collective

Connecting incarcerated Friends with outside Quakers
Visit nyym.org/content/inside-outside or write to Judy Meikle at the yearly meeting office, 15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003.

ONLINE EVENTS

Coordinating Committee Weekend Friday, Jan 29 - Sunday, Jan 31

Most New York Yearly Meeting committees are grouped by focus into organizing "coordinating committees." There are coordinating committees for Ministry, Witness (social justice), and General Services, and these committees will meet during this weekend. Friends can attend any of these meetings to learn about how the Spirit is moving in our yearly meeting. Register at nyym.org/CC-2021

Save the Date for Spring Sessions

The NYYM community gathers together each spring. This year's Spring Sessions will be held **online on April 9-11, 2021**. Save the date!

Around Our Yearly Meeting

Winter Meetings for Discernment February 13, 2021

Meetings for Discernment are periods of extended, waiting worship designed to discern leadings and strengthen connections in our yearly meeting. The Winter Meeting for Discernment will be held in three online Zoom sessions on Saturday, February 13. Our query will be: **As a faithful Quaker community, how are we now called to witness?** Registration information will be at nyym.org and emailed to the NYYM list.

Events for Young Adults

The Interim Young Adult Field Secretary, Marissa Badgley, continues to organize a schedule of virtual get-togethers, workshops, and worship designed for young adults (ages 18-35-ish) but open to all. Visit bit.ly/NYYM-yafcal1 for all upcoming events and opportunities!



Powell House has gone virtual!

Powell House, the retreat and conference center for NYYM, offers **virtual workshops**, using the Zoom conferencing technology, on a donate-as-led basis. Go to **poho.org** to see the full list of upcoming events at Powell House; new events are being scheduled all the time.

Powell House Youth Program is Holding Online Conferences

www.powellhouse.org/youth-program
Upcoming virtual youth weekends: **Bundling Up and Hunkering Down** for 9th-12th grades and young adults, Jan. 29-31
Tales, Fables, and Yarns, 3rd-12th grade and young adults, Feb. 12-14
Building, Changing, Inventing, 3rd-6th grades, March 5-7

Friends Committee on National Legislation Spring Lobby Weekend March 20-23, 2021

At FCNL's Spring Lobby Weekend hundreds of students, recent grads, and young adults, Quaker and not, will gather to learn and virtually lobby Congress. The focus this year is justice reform. Find out more at fcn.org/events/spring-lobby-weekend-2021

Friends General Conference (FGC) Year-Round Youth Program

As the pandemic continues, FGC is offering several year-round virtual programs for youth so we can stay

in community. Visit fgcquaker.org/connect/gathering/programs-and-events/year-round-youth-programs

Family Devotionals for Younger Children

These daily Zoom (videoconference) calls are designed for adults and children participating together. The audience primarily in mind is kids in elementary school and preschool. We'll have singing together, a story, and a query. We'll have a chance for some discussion, either as a whole group or in virtual small groups. Devotionals are offered every weekday morning at 8 a.m. ET and every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 7 p.m. ET. Find the link to register at quakeremily.wordpress.com/connection-in-a-time-of-covid-19/family-devotionals/

ONLINE WORSHIP

Many of the local (monthly) meetings in the New York Yearly Meeting area are holding online meetings for worship every week. Visit nyym.org/online-worship-opportunities for the full list.

Powell House Online Worship Saturdays at 6:00 p.m.

Powell House, the conference and retreat center for New York Yearly Meeting, holds a meeting for worship via Zoom every Saturday at 6:00 p.m. Contact Regina at regina@powellhouse.org for information on how to join.

Friends General Conference (FGC) Online Worship

FGC offers general worship on Saturdays at 9 p.m.; for People of Color, worship on Wednesdays at 1 and 8 p.m. and worship sharing on Tuesdays at 5 p.m.; and a weekly Meeting for Worship for Friends of European Descent Confronting Racism and White Supremacy on Fridays at 12 noon. Find all details and links at fgcquaker.org/resources/online-worship-opportunities

Pendle Hill Worship in the Barn

Members of the Pendle Hill community gather in the Barn for worship every day from 8:30 a.m. to 9:10 a.m. Connection information is at pendlehill.org/explore/worship/join-us-online-for-worship-in-the-barn/

FWCC's Worldwide Worship List

Friends World Committee of

Consultation (FWCC) has compiled a list of meetings holding worship online around the world, here: fwcc.world/kinds-of-friends/online-worship

OPPORTUNITIES

Quaker Voluntary Service

Young Adult Friends can apply for Quaker Voluntary Service, an 11-month experiment living at the intersection of transformational spirituality and activism. Young adults work full-time at community based organizations addressing a wide range of issues, while living in a cooperative house and worshipping with, and being mentored by, local Quakers. Applications and references for the 2021-2022 QVS Fellowship are due March 15, 2021. Visit quakervoluntaryservice.org.

Bogert Grants

The Elizabeth Ann Bogert Memorial Fund for the Study and Practice of Christian Mysticism makes annual grants of up to \$1,000 to individuals, groups, or institutions. Applications are due by March 1, 2021. Read the brochure at fwccamericas.org/docs/Bogert_Fund_Brochure_2020.pdf (Note the single spaces between each word.)

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I Accept the Apology

Yohannes (Knowledge)
Johnson

Bulls Head Oswego MM

This is a response to the "Apology to Afro-Descendants," approved by NYYM in 2013 and reprinted in Sept. 2020's Spark. Knowledge is African-American and attends the Green Haven Prison Worship Group.

In their "Apology to Afro-Descendants" the New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) have made a powerful statement in bridging the gap that exists between people of greater and lesser hue. I have often wondered and asked myself what it would feel like to see and hear from one of a privileged group the words spoken on behalf of a collective and my prayers have been answered. I know it may not be much to many and is reflective of a small segment of the society we live in, but it is a start, a good start, in opening a dialogue between two groups whose relationship was legally established as being one between master and servant.

While today we are not responsible for the actions of our ancestors of recent and distant past, we share in collective responsibility today to correct those errors made then that still affect us today. And while there may have been those who may have hinted at a personal apology it seems as if their apology cloaked a hidden agenda that served only to reflect or shine a light upon them individually. I have experienced how hard it can be to apologize for past transgressions and know personally how hard it can be to admit being wrong, especially when it seems everyone seeks to be seen in a better or greater light.

But after all is said and done, I admit to a sense of shame but mostly relief having shed the burdens of carrying around the heavy burden of guilt. And the best part, or so it seems to me, is to be able to move forward in my new life as I strive to remain focused on not repeating the errors of my (or others) past actions but instead serving as an example how freely one can maneuver in life so as to assist others in their life's journey, not as an adversary, but rather as an assistant or helpmate.

Editor's Note

This issue of *Spark*, the printed newsletter for New York Yearly Meeting Quakers, was guest-edited by the Another World is Possible Working Group. Thank you! In these articles, we are challenged to think differently and imagine new kinds of changes. There were more articles than we had space to print; please read the rest on nyym.org/spark.

NYYM sends a weekly email newsletter. If you aren't receiving it, but would like to, please email walter@nyym.org.

Please consider writing something or submitting images for *Spark*. Submissions are considered a form of written ministry.

Upcoming *Spark* themes: March: One Year of COVID-19.

It will be one year since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Quarantine restrictions and isolation have affected our ability to worship as well as our daily routines and plans. Many people have experienced losses of loved ones or experienced a frightening illness. Do you have a story from this year? Is there anything you've learned?

Please contribute to this sharing of ideas. Deadline for the March issue is Feb. 1. Email article and photo submissions to communications@nyym.org. Please limit yourself to 400-600 words.

Don't forget to email me your meeting's news so it can be shared in the next weekly email update or in *Spark*.

Find NYYM on **Facebook** (NewYorkYearlyMeeting), **Twitter** (NYYMtweets), and **Instagram** (newyorkyearlymeeting).
Happy new year.

—Sarah Way, NYYM
Communications Director
communications@nyym.org

Donate to NYYM

Visit nyym.org/donate or mail a check to the yearly meeting office at 15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003. Thanks!

Another World is Possible Toolkit

Jens Braun
Old Chatham

For years now, I have been collecting "nuts and bolts" to help make another world possible.

This is a request for YOU to share "aha!" moments that:

- lead to understandings you cannot unsee once seen,
- offer tools that are easier to incorporate in one's life than is massive social change.

Here are three examples of categories and some items on my list, which I view as tools in a toolbox.

Language: Words give permission and shape thought or perception as an outgrowth of culture.

- Many native languages use personal pronouns for most everything other than items made by humans. When you mine a mountain, you are mining HER. As you cut down a tree, you are ending HIS life. In those languages, everything on the planet is a person in their own right.
- English has numerous phrases like *natural/human resources* and *environmental regulations*. The first unconsciously leads us to look at the world from an economic vantage. We expand this with words like "timber" and "wild game." The second, *regulations*, conveys we know the process is dangerous or poisonous, but we can do it anyway, just up to a government-negotiated limit.
- English lacks words like the Japanese "wabi-sabi" that means "beautiful because it is broken, impermanent, or incomplete."
- *Garbage, waste, rubbish, and trash* are four words for a concept that hasn't needed to even exist in some cultures.

Personal responses to events:

Culture teaches "normal" responses, but many normal approaches can be abandoned for better, abnormal ones.

- Recognize punishment as an inherently flawed deterrent to misbehavior. We are blessed that Quakers are deeply involved in developing alternative responses to actions that go against social

and legal norms!

- Invest in dignity. Our culture features shame, competition, ridicule, generating low self-esteem. Seek to uphold the dignity of everyone in all interactions.
- Choose to play infinite rather than finite games.* Finite games are bounded by time and place, depend on third-party recognition, and involve competition that generates winners and losers. Infinite games have the objective of keeping the game going. Friendships, marriages, the depth of meeting for worship, living with more environmental consciousness, singing often — these are all infinite games.
- Seek out the non-traditional skills and abilities in every person. While schools and society in general value a short list of what all should know, it is often the little-noticed skills that brighten life, spark imagination, and offer value-added living. Defusing tension, unusual hobbies, on-target compliments, seeing what makes a place more beautiful, and expressing the important lessons of an experience are all examples.

Time: Time is often a source of anxiety. It is a resource. It is money. It is fleeting. It points towards death. It flows past and is gone. We don't have enough of it.

- But try this other view: Time is cyclical. Time is a friend that comes around again, as the earth circles the sun. Time links us to ancestors and future generations. Time gives space to grow, learn, teach and share. Mercifully, it brings understanding, adaptation, evolution, and change. It allows us to look back to our roots, forward with imagination, and around us at the role wisdom plays in our midst.

Please write to me with some of your tools and concepts of cultural change that are all about how to live into that other world which is possible.

It is easier to not use a word or to make someone feel valued than it is to stop using fossil fuels. Perhaps we won't stop drilling for oil until our language changes.

— Jens Braun, sjbraun@taconic.net
*see James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games*



A Better World IS Possible

Frederick Drew Robinson
Otisville Worship Group

continued from page 1

product of wish fulfillment, it is the product of sustained struggle.

It will never be enough to wish there to be a better world. We must build the social and institutional structures that will ensure that the benefits derived from our efforts toward peace and justice accrue to all. We must create a theoretical framework around the concepts of justice and equality that will serve as a blueprint for the building of a new world order. We must get our hands dirty and do the work.

A recent example can be seen in the removals of monuments that venerate supremacist ideology. More than the removal of granite and stone, they signify the removal of cultural ideals which have led to the oppression of others. The removal of all such symbols and insignia demonstrates our belief that they do not represent the core values of our society. The real work involves affirming and, in some cases, redefining what our core values are.

The pandemic which has caused the loss of so many lives and the destruction of so many dreams has awakened us to the need for such a redefinition. The message is clear. Either we roll up our sleeves and tackle the systemic problems we have faced for so long or we will actually take a step backward in the march of human history. This is not a time to be hopeless. It is a time to be hopeful. A crisis such as this demands our best effort, our best skill and knowledge applied to the necessary task of making the world a better place.

A better world is possible. It is within the realm of our greatest ideas. It is within the reach of each outstretched hand—one person to the other—with love, care, and concern for the attainment of peace and prosperity for all.

A better world is possible when we see the senselessness of war. A better world is possible when no one is homeless or hungry. A better world is possible when no one suffers the insecurity that results from income inequality.

A better world is possible when collectively we realize that God is active in the affairs of mankind.

Our Spiritual Crisis

Liseli Haines
Mohawk Valley Meeting

continued from page 1

was one of a green lawn, the water tank next to the house, the low patch of spikey pineapple plants and the tall green trees beyond with the calls of birds and monkeys. All capped by the clear blue sky. As I stepped through the door, I heard a voice. And the words that were implanted in my head and my soul at that moment were “God is all around.” When God speaks there is no denying that voice and I knew instantly that it was true. God was in all I could see and hear, and beyond, in the very air I was breathing. It was a knowing that nothing could change. There was no going back. To this day this knowing informs my life. It informs my actions, and it informs my love for the green and growing world that is all around me. God is in all of it, not just humans, but the green trees and grass, the animals, and birds in the trees, even the rocks and mountains.

Many of us have lost our way. We have focused on other things that have taken over importance in our lives. Our western culture has lost our interconnectedness with the Earth, with the land we walk on, with the trees and the rocks, the plants and animals. We have forgotten our dependence on Earth and all that she gives us; that we depend on her for everything we have and are. We are the water in the creeks that also flows in our veins. We are the trees on the hill that breathe out the oxygen we breathe in. We knew this once, a long time ago. Our ancestors knew this when they were indigenous somewhere on this Earth. I know you know this too deep inside.

How do we take up this call of our ancestors? Do we start by acknowledging our colonialist/dominant cultural norms and how we have been taught to “subdue and dominate” the Earth? Can we start by changing our language and not “othering” the “more than

human” inhabitants of the land? Do we start by spending time every day sitting outside in quiet and contemplation, listening, feeling, hearing, smelling and seeing what is all around us? Or by jettisoning the idea of scarcity and acknowledging the abundance all around us with gratitude, not just on Sundays, not just at mealtimes, but with every breath we take?

I know you know this, but I am reminding you.

**—from Robin Wall Kimmerer, On the Language of Animacy; Orion Magazine, 2017*

Vibrant Possibilities

Mahayana Landowne
Brooklyn Meeting

In 2020, I noticed that I have been deeply ingrained with the idea that there is good and bad theater, but that I was not conscious of whose eyes were defining “good.” My “good” is based on some incredible work—the western canon has some cool stuff—but there are also incredibly rich traditions and fresh voices that I may not know how to appreciate based on my life experience.

I see art as a way of communicating across differences, a place where everyone has the ability to interpret the art/world as they choose. Like Quakerism, we all discover meaning for ourselves.

I didn’t know or see how culture is also set up to suppress. Art can be used as a weapon. The very act of valuing one work above another means that not everything is valued equally.

For me this sets up an internal sense of never being good enough, smart enough, or experienced enough to be able to express anything that anyone would ever understand. The object or event that was created for a heartfelt reason by an artist is placed into an elite hierarchy that thrives on judgment.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Artistic expression can be shared, encouraged, opened up, reinterpreted, and stretched. We can invite others in and invite them to participate in whatever way they feel comfortable.

We can be aware that centuries of complicated history can be revealed with patience and grace.

We can expand ourselves and our vision of what it is to be inclusive.

I can define “good” as what I like or prefer based on my experience and cultural identity, but stay open to and interested in your perspective and what you like. We have the ability to begin to expand and invite richer and more vibrant possibilities into our lives.

What part of “not liking” is part of our lack of understanding or connection? What part is based on values we have internalized that we may not even realize we have? Yes, the questions are endless, but that’s all right!

As an artist, I have also noticed that many people have been taught to fear creativity. It is a radical act to imagine other possibilities and be able to share them.

I’m imagining and longing to help create a world where everyone feels empowered and valued. Where everyone can engage creatively and judgments are lifted. The room becomes a more exciting room to be in when everyone in it understands that their voice and vision matter.

We can notice where hierarchy is embedded in our systems and shift it. I believe art can change this way and so can our Quaker practice.

Listening to Stories, to Divine

Cai Quirk
Ithaca Meeting

continued from page 1

spirituality, and storytelling? Stories are not false tales but ever-relevant ones. They invite knowledge that is deeper than the brain, reaching into the heart, emotions, body, soul. They encourage connections that span across distances, time, even to other realms or layers of the spirit world. Metaphors in stories lead to meanings the listeners and readers may use to find deeper insight into their own lives. Science and history in a modern American sense use primarily evidence-based and linear ways of thinking. Some call these “objective,” because personal biases are minimized, and value these forms more than storytelling. Neither stories nor science, nor other ways of understanding, are inher-



ently more valid. Value comes from matching a particular set of criteria. Take oil and water, for example. If one is thirsty, oil will not quench one's thirst, and therefore water is more valuable than oil in that situation. Similarly, if we want to learn about a particular time in history in a specific location, evidence-based research may provide the kind of information one is looking for, yet if we want to learn how the people thought back then or how their world-views interacted with the land and people around them, the stories and legends of that time might give us much more insight.

Stories and legends aren't just tales created long ago, but ones created more recently as well. They extend beyond literal facts to deeper meanings and connections. Such tales have great power to inspire, connect us to one another, and create a sense of belonging and identity. This isn't to say that stories and metaphors are better than science, or that these and other ways of thinking can't intermingle. In many indigenous cultures, science and storytelling do intermingle, such as in legends about why a plant only grows in a particular location—the legend may show relationships between different plants and animals that are learned from observation over a period of time, and weave this together with a lesson about relationships that guides the listener in their own life. In modern American culture where stronger emphasis is on science and facts, turning to stories, metaphors, and even Spirit, takes more intentionality. What might we learn if we open to different ways of knowing?

Looking at legends and stories today offers ways to find deeper insight into our own lives and ways of interacting with the world around us. The stories can act as mirrors, the metaphors reflecting our lives so our inner teacher can learn through a new lens. These new lessons and knowledge will likely be different for each person or when someone hears the same story many times throughout their life. Like listening for Divine in Quaker worship, when we can take a moment to pause from the frantic pace of the world and listen more deeply, hearing meanings behind the words; we make space for not only these lessons, but also the

inner teacher and Spirit to further guide us. These learnings, leanings, leadings, and guidance show up less often in the facts, figures, and linearity that science and history teach us to value, and more often in abstracted forms, senses, and other ways that are often hard to put directly into words. By opening up further to story and metaphor, to guidance that isn't always immediately clear, we practice listening in ways that also open us further to hearing the Divine. 



Woodcut by Geoffrey Navias

The Spring at the Heart of the Earth

Liseli Haines
Mohawk Valley Meeting

The heart of the Earth where the clear water ripples
Emerging from darkness to the light of the spring.

The heart of the Earth where the snow melts away
To feed the green pool of life everlasting.

The heart of the Earth with maples above me
Givers of life in the spring of the year.

The heart of the Earth where the watercress flowers
Green in the waters of life and rebirth.

The heart of the Earth where the yellowthroat's song
Captures the joy of the old soul within.

The heart of the Earth where the cattails arise
To wave in the breezes that blow from the hill.

The heart of the Earth where the white cedar rustles
And stands as a beacon to all who will come.

The heart of the Earth where the deer whuffles softly
Bringing her notice to the mourning one here.

The heart of the Earth where the brown vole emerges
And says to the watcher "all is not lost."

The heart of the Earth where the full moon arises
To shine on the water, the heart of my soul.

I go to the spring, to the heart of the Earth
And lay down my life to be one with them all. 

Imagine.

Shirley Way
Ithaca Meeting

continued from page 1

when I do and I do it, the burden lifts and the work is healing for me and others, nourishing, liberating and joy-filled.

Just as a gymnast must be able to see themselves in their mind executing their routine, we must also be able to envision the world we want if we are to be empowered to move toward it.

Imagine. Imagine a world without privilege, without any of the isms, without poverty, with climate change reversed. What would that look like, feel like? How freeing it would be. Everyone has what we need—healthy food, comforting shelter, clean water and air, a restored earth, education, healthcare. Everyone. No more guilt because I have what you do not.

Without the barriers to real relationship that injustices create, we become free to form healthy relationships and communities that are real, truly loving, life-affirming, creative, resilient, flexible and changeable.

To get there, we need to begin by healing ourselves. Whether we realize it or not, we are broken, wounded, and traumatized, and therefore operating at diminished capacity. The earth herself, of which we are inextricably a part, is broken, wounded, and traumatized. The racism we breathe traumatizes whether we are white or a person of color. The effects of the genocide our ancestors suffered, witnessed, or took part in is in our DNA. (See

Thomas Hübl's work on collective trauma at thomashuebl.com.)

It is common inside prison to hear, "Hurt people hurt people." It's true. If we can heal ourselves, we can be available to help others heal and break the cycle of violence and trauma that confuses, isolates, numbs, and paralyzes.

The Alternatives to Violence Project opened the door to my own healing, and through it I have witnessed the healing of hundreds, maybe thousands of people. It is a gift we have inherited and we have expanded.

Healing is a continual process because life wounds us again and again. I must be vigilant and find ways to heal daily. Selfcare means I am more available to God and others. Part of selfcare is paying attention to what I let in. The algorithms target and entice and I must be intentional and limit my intake of social media, "news," and "entertainment," and make space for God, for Spirit.

Let's make healing ourselves our first work, remembering we cannot give what we do not have—peace, love, connection, wholeness. Let's allow ourselves to release the pain, the grief, the sorrow. And then let's together envision the world we want. 

Advice from Friends Peace Team

To be **pro-actively anti-racist**, we ask:

- How do inequality and injustice "show up" in our meetings, in our work, and how can we keep from perpetuating it?
- How do we identify and interrupt harmful implicit biases, perceptions, and power dynamics in our meetings and work?
- How do we cultivate relationships that draw on everyone's experiences, insights, and cultures in an equitable and socially just way?
- How can we make transformational changes in dominant groups and structures, starting with us? 



Building Resilience

Shirley Way
Ithaca Meeting

There have been great strides in trauma healing research in recent years and it has been exciting and empowering to incorporate the techniques and understandings into Alternatives to Violence Project workshops.

Nadine Hoover, working with many others, developed Creating Cultures of Peace, an AVP special topic series that takes participants through Transforming Power, Trauma Resilience, Conscience, Liberation and Discernment. See Nadine's book, *Creating Cultures of Peace: A Movement of Love and Conscience*, 2018.

Since 2015, Karen Reixach (Keene MM, NEYM) and I, later joined by Trudy Buxenbaum (Poplar Ridge MM), together with the inside team at Cayuga Prison, have facilitated the AVP Trauma Resilience Workshop with newly trained facilitators as participants. This workshop is the most powerful and transformative in our toolbox. Prior to taking this workshop, the participants have completed three 21-hour workshops. Most understand Transforming Power and have begun to believe in its power, and they almost universally have begun to believe in their own power for good. Together we have done the work of building community in the group and each of us is cared-for by the group. This creates space for us to be our real selves, making space for healing.

AVP is not only for people who are incarcerated. It is for all of us. Practicing healing can build our resilience so that when confronted with what might otherwise be a traumatic event, we remain calm, alert, and capable, and we are not traumatized by the event.

Early in every workshop we draw our core selves—the source of our goodness, creativity, confidence, compassion, and courage. Our core selves become our safe place—a place we carry in us, always available, always true. So when we remember a traumatic event or experience what could be a traumatic event, instead of freezing or fleeing or fighting, we can remember to stay present in



Gnarled trunk of a tree—possibly a white cedar. "What do you say to such a tree?" Photo (and caption) by Geoffrey Navias

our core self, remaining calm and alert and connected. The more we can practice being present in our core selves, the more resilient we become.

Following Hurricane Eta's destructive path through Honduras and Guatemala, Val Liveoak of Friends Peace Teams' Peacebuilding en las Americas asked Amanda Roberts to offer a one-day PRISE (Paraprofessionals with Resilience Intervention Skills and Education) training for bilingual AVP facilitators with the hope that we will be able to share the training with facilitators in Latin America. The practices are stunningly simple and seem to be able to rewire the brain so that the traumatic memory loses its power. It is very exciting and I look forward to incorporating the techniques into the AVP workshops that I am a part of.

The Good Mind

Liseli Haines
Mohawk Valley Meeting

In preparation for going on the Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign in 2013, I picked up a book by Vine Deloria Jr called *God Is Red*. Of the many interesting things in the book, there was one that I must have been ready to hear, because it jumped out at me, made me put the book down and say "Oh". Vine Deloria Jr. was talking about the Good Mind, a concept we also heard about from Onondaga Clan Mother Freida Jacques at Summer Sessions some years ago. As Vine Deloria Jr.

said, we all know that doing good works in our community can make a better and stronger community; but the Good Mind goes beyond that. It is the concept that you must not only be of service but must think only good thoughts as well, because every one of your thoughts, both good and bad, also affects your community. I immediately thought of a woman that I know who I found irritating. Someone I could be civil to, but who inside annoyed me almost every time she opened her mouth. I realized that these thoughts were surely affecting the way that I spoke to her and regarded her in the community, and that my actions could never compensate for those thoughts. I knew that this was not good for me, not good for her, and not good for the community. In that moment, I knew that I could love this woman for who she was. I no longer needed to judge her or even be irritated by her but could accept and even welcome her into my life.

It has not always been this instantaneous, nor am I always able to hold myself to the ways of the Good Mind. One thing that helps me tremendously is a way I have started to think of people who I find challenging to love. For 26 years I worked as a maternity nurse in the newborn nursery and special care nursery. I held thousands of newborn babies in that time. I looked into their eyes and I fell in love. And I know, without a doubt, that each and every one of those children was born perfect, a perfect child with all the potential in the world. Then life happened. It happened differently to each one of them, but it happened; the good, the bad, the ugly. Many, perhaps all, lost some of their potential to be a perfect human being. But when I meet a person that challenges me, I imagine that person as a perfect newborn baby in their mother's arms, or in my arms. The baby whose eyes I look into and with whom I fall in love. The baby with all the potential in the world. And I know that these people who challenge me, still have that perfect newborn inside and I can still fall in love.

I think of this as the Good Mind: being able to fall in love with each person who I encounter. Oh, no, I

am not perfect at it. I still have my challenges; times when I forget they have a perfect person inside, when I forget to look for the newborn eyes. But I will keep trying.

Caste, Dirty Work, Love

Rebekah Rice
Saratoga Meeting

Let us reimagine sewage, garbage, cleaning, and [insert your most hated "chore" here]. While we are at it, let's reimagine the growing of food, the fixing of broken things, and the tasks of giving care to people of any age who cannot easily take care of themselves.

People may believe that these items do not take skill, imagination, creativity, time, or dedication—but they absolutely do. Truly, none of us would prefer to live in a world where these jobs went undone.

At this moment, there are people whose only option for paid work is to do this dirty work, all the time. Across the world these people are seen as being at the bottom (or even below the bottom as with the Dalits in India) of the caste structure.

Without compromising anyone's livelihood, what is to be done about equality?

How can we, as Friends, co-create a world in which everyone has satisfying work? It is not enough that we do our own dirty work; without addressing the systemic nature of the caste system, that would merely reduce the amount of such work available for others.

I've been considering the intentionality with which Camphill Villages have created communities that support all with loving kindnesses; villagers from each house clean and cook for another house, coming home to the same having been done for them. Simultaneously, care is provided for the differently abled adults who live in the village, skills are developed, and a sense of self in a community of love is created.

How might we all share the work of the world? How might we all share the fruits of our labor? How can we stop participating in the caste structure?



Imagining a World Without Prisons

Judy Meikle
Wilton Meeting

In a recent article in *Sojourner Magazine*, Joshua Dubler and Vincent W. Lloyd, writing as scholars and religious practitioners who have worked with incarcerated people for two decades, argue that “the principal obstacle to (prison) abolition is its seeming impossibility. Making the impossible possible calls for an exercise in radical imagination.” As a Quaker, with a core belief of that of God in every person, I choose to imagine the impossible and work towards a world without prisons.

Although slavery was “officially” abolished by the 13th Amendment of 1865, prisons continue the morally outrageous legacy of denying human worth. Our current prison system normalizes the horrendous practice of caging people and is based on the lie that this serves public safety and justice. Today’s prison abolitionists lift up a vision where communities are made secure by providing resources and services, and where institutions and systems that do harm are dismantled and replaced

with restorative practices.

Abolitionists also direct us to focus on policy work that reduces the scope and footprint of the prison industrial complex by closing prisons and jails, stopping new prison construction, and reducing prison populations. We can examine our Quaker prison witness through an abolitionist lens. Do the reforms that we advocate for accept a narrative that prisons are a given? Or do they dismantle the system? Do the programs we fund foster transformative justice by remedialing harms?

If the obstacle to a shared vision of abolition is the seeming impossibility, how does one begin? A first step is to care about and be in relationship with the incarcerated. When people are put in cages, they are out of sight and out of mind; they become the forgotten “other.” It has been my experience that my relationships with incarcerated Friends help me stay grounded in the need to hold space for an abolitionist vision.

The invitation to us in NYYM is to step into mutual ministry with those in prison and those who are coming home. Through prison ministry—worshipping with or visiting and corresponding with incarcerated Quakers—outside

Friends connect with inside Friends on a human-to-human basis. It is mutual ministry because it is a shared experience in which both people are giving and receiving the blessing of spiritual support.

The legacy of Fay Honey Knopp has been a constant inspiration to me. She was a member of my meeting and was designated a “minister of record” to serve as a prison visitor throughout the Federal system. In 1976 she collaborated with a group of fellow activists to publish the book *Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists*. This book was reprinted in 2005 by Critical Resistance and has informed generations of people organizing for a better world.

Can we agree that “Prisons Are Not the Answer”? As Friends, we are rooted in our testimony of peace, in supporting non-violent methods of achieving change. “War Is Not the Answer” is our mantra. Knowing that the prison system perpetuates violence and is an engine of harm to communities, we must commit to people, not prisons.

“Abolitionists are, simply put, those beings who look out upon their time and say “NO.”—Mumia Abu-Jamal, incarcerated journalist



One of the vessels made by Geoffrey from a felled tree. Photo by Geoffrey Navias

walking in the woods. New and old paths. I wander, humming to the trees, specific trees.

Seven years ago, I started a project initiated by a specific white pine tree which had been knocked down by one of our then unusual climate storms. I milled the wood, dried it for two years, all the while wondering what to make of this great tree. Upon occasion, I would visit where the tree had stood. What of the people, animals, and forest lives that gathered here under the auspices of this tree?

This has started me on a process of working with local trees, felled in climate storms, re-imagining them as sacred vessels. Thus far I’ve done three series, one of White Pine, Butternut, and Cherry. The vessels invite one to put something precious within...symbolic and/or real. What is precious to you?

I have increasingly valued my sense of the tree; rooted, interwoven, holding down and together the earth.

Where I take delight, my music, sitting across from me, the guitar, banjo, and my mother’s baby grand piano are wood from trees which grew for years in specific places.

As I write this, I am sitting on rather old trees which were fashioned into a chair inherited from my grandfather; sitting at trees made into a desk; I am living in hundreds of very old trees which were built into a tavern 224 years ago during the last year of George Washington Presidency.

I am spending more time listening to the trees, wondering, 224 years from now, what they will have to tell us?



Community Agreements to live by in all our relationships

Based on these sources: the Alternatives to Violence Project, Creating Cultures of Peace, and The Work That Reconnects

- Look for and affirm the good in self and others.
- No putdowns or put-ups (on pedestals) of self or others.
- Stop. Listen. Don’t interrupt.
- Speak simply and honestly without fear of mistakes.
- Volunteer myself only.
- Speak from my own experience, not other’s without permission.
- Consent—ask early and ask often—especially around touch.
- Make space, take space—move up move up. If you are socialized to take up space, please check yourself before speaking, if you are socialized to not take up space, please push yourself to move up move up move up.
- (Self) Regulate—opt-out if too intense.
- Avoid advice-giving.
- Avoid unnecessary apologizing.
- Impact and Intent—both are important and the impact of something I say or do is more important than my intent.



Walking

Geoffrey Navias
Hamilton Meeting

Walking. Pausing to let the music of my feet crunching through the fallen leaves disappear. Pausing, the quiet fills with wind, and the song of bird, dazzling, reaches me, shifting in with flecked sun light. And slowly the hum of all things living filtered through the woods, of breaking branches, of the creek, of route 13, of leaves falling, of tiny insects with laudable voices living in the leaf cover and decaying fallen forest floor. I want to see. I want to see what is up ahead in that opening of sunlight and color. But for now, pausing to take in the culmination of time. Years untold, where the world and I pause. We reach this moment. The forest and I celebrate in the preparation for winter. Onward.

The isolation of these times has invited me to spend more time



Another World is Possible

Yes, a Better World is Possible!

Nancy Black
Brooklyn Meeting

Many of us at Brooklyn Meeting were inspired by the Black Lives Matter protest marches that filled the streets on an almost daily basis following the George Floyd killing at the end of May. I live in Downtown Brooklyn, one block from the meetinghouse, and on the corner of a boulevard that leads onto the Brooklyn Bridge. I could see, peripherally, most of the marches along that route, either heading to or coming from the bridge. However, one of those marches actually came down my street, and I was able to see the marchers from beginning to end. For forty-five minutes, socially-distanced, mostly masked individuals, Whites and Blacks together, streamed past under my window. Later, I learned that my daughter and another member of our meeting were among them.

We in Brooklyn Meeting, like so many across the nation, became acutely aware of the injustices, past and present, committed against black and brown folks in our midst. Inspired by these events, Brooklyn

Meeting approved the following minute on June 4th:

Black lives matter. The members of Brooklyn Meeting are committed to joining with others of good will in seeking inclusive justice for all and dismantling systemic racism. Brooklyn Meeting commits itself to spending the next year focused on building racial justice through the actions of individuals, small study groups, standing committees, and alliances with others beyond the meeting.

Maria Arias and I were named co-clerks of an Ad Hoc Committee on Racial Justice. A committee of seven was quickly constituted, and we have been meeting approximately every two weeks ever since. We view ourselves as primarily a coordinating committee, devoted to encouraging work within the meeting in three areas: (1) individual work to examine ingrained racist attitudes and understand white supremacy; (2) analysis of meeting structures and processes to ensure inclusivity; (3) identification of concrete actions the meeting can take to challenge structural racism in the larger society.

A great deal of work during the past seven months has been accom-

plished spontaneously by individuals outside of our Ad Hoc Committee on Racial Justice. A White Quaker Anti-Racist Affinity Group meets monthly. A book group is reading *Black Fire: African American Quakers on Spirituality and Human Rights*, edited by Harold D. Weaver Jr., et al. Friends are encouraged to journal about their reading and activities. Monthly NYC ARCH meetings have been reading *Say the Wrong Thing* by Dr. Amanda Kemp. The History and Library Committee has posted information weekly and is readying for publication a very informative booklet, *Brooklyn, Quakers, and Slavery 1672-1865*. Our committee has been heartened by these activities. In addition, in order to encourage analysis of meeting structures, we sent a set of queries to standing committees and asked them to include a summary of their discussions in their annual reports to the meeting.

More recently we have turned our attention to identification of concrete actions the meeting might take to promote racial justice. To this end we prepared a document, "Potential Issues of Anti-Racist Engagement," that identified six issues: education; defunding the police/re-imagining policing;

prison/criminal justice reform; economic justice; health care and well-being; and environmental justice. For each issue, we listed specific platforms/agenda; connections to Quaker testimonies; and opportunities and entry points for engagement. We distributed the document and then held an information meeting on November 18, 2020. After a brief presentation on each issue, a period of worship-sharing followed.

We are following up with a workshop on each issue; two have already been held—on education and on policing—and we are planning workshops on the remaining four issues in 2021. We hope to identify one or two issues for the meeting as a whole to focus on; alternatively, we may decide to form clusters of folks to work on all six issues. Throughout this process, we are paying attention to the spiritual basis of our work, knowing that, without strong leadings and guidance of the spirit, we can accomplish little.



There's more!

Read more **Another World is Possible** articles online at nnyym.org/spark



Upcoming NYYM Sessions

New York Yearly Meeting (NYYM) is the organization that gathers together the Quaker congregations in NY State, northern NJ, and southwestern CT.

Spring Sessions

April 9-11, 2021

All Friends are invited to attend any or all of Spring Sessions. The yearly meeting will gather online on April 9-11 for business and for worship. Meet other NY/NJ/CT-area Quakers and experience Quaker practice in action! Registration and more info will appear at nnyym.org.

Spring and Fall Sessions: New York Yearly Meeting gathers for a weekend each spring and fall. For a few years, after 2021, NYYM will be experimenting with holding Spring Sessions at the same location each year: Oakwood Friends School, in Poughkeepsie, NY. In addition, Fall Sessions will be held online for the next several years to make them more accessible and Earth-friendly.

Summer Sessions

July 25-31, 2021

Summer Sessions is a week-long gathering of Friends where we can worship, play, work, and be in community with each other. At the time of publication, the Sessions Committee is moving forward with plans to once again hold our yearly Summer Sessions at Silver Bay YMCA, a campus on Lake George in the Adirondacks. Sessions will again use the **Pay As Led** funding model, allowing Friends who can pay more to pay more so that Friends who need to pay less can pay less. Summer Sessions will take place July 24-31. If a decision is made to hold Summer Sessions online again this year, an announcement will be

made in the next couple of months.

Whether Summer Sessions is held online or not, there will be:

- **Worship Sharing Groups.** These small groups meet every day during Summer Sessions. Usually, a query or theme is provided. Participants are given the chance to explore the query in a sacred, worshipful space, and to share with each other in a deep and spiritual way.
- **Interest Groups.** Interest Groups are a good way to introduce yourself to a topic or to dive deeper, to learn and to share, and can consist of a presentation, slide show, film, discussion group, or other activity.
- **Business Meetings,** also known as Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business. At business meetings our Quaker

practice is put into action.

Everyone present is part of the decision-making body, and goes through discernment and the finding of the way forward together. Reports on the recent activities of committees and individuals are also heard. Business meeting is a great way to find out how Spirit is moving around the New York Yearly Meeting area.

If Summer Sessions is held in person, many events will also take place online. The goal is to make Summer Sessions accessible to everyone, even those who can't physically make it to our meeting. Please save the date and expect updated information to appear on nnyym.org and in future issues of *Spark*.

