

# WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 152, JANUARY 2021

61 Tuhikaramea Rd., Hamilton 3204. widerquakerfellowship@quaker.org.nz

## WHAT DO I KNOW?

Several weeks ago a Facebook friend posted a statement that disturbed and puzzled me. She said, *'Only humans exist, because we are the only creatures able to conceptualise existence. Other things are, but without ability to conceive their own existence. I can conceive my own death, no other creature can do so.'*

This is 2021. So I was surprised to read such a concrete statement, no if's or doubts. It took me back to childhood. My best friend and I, aged 11, had a game where we tried to outdo each other with lists of the names of all the animals known on earth. We looked at books about animals, we looked in the encyclopaedia. One book was very definite that it contained pictures and descriptions of all the animals on earth. That was what we were looking for. We believed that all the animals were known.

A lot of popular science in the middle of last century seemed to believe everything had been found out, there was nothing more to find. At that time popular belief was that humans were vastly superior to other animals because we made tools, and we could talk. That wasn't true of course, and people who studied animal behaviour gradually opened our eyes to animals that did make tools. Studies in behaviour and neurology and genetics continue to discover more about us and about our fellow creatures. Humans have only explored the tip of all there is. And that is probably why my friend's statement startled me.

It also reminded me of the time a few years later when my friend and I went to catechism classes in preparation for confirmation. We both went to the same Anglican church. Catechism was a list of things we were supposed to believe before we could be confirmed in the faith. I didn't believe some of it, or rather I couldn't see the point of some of it, for instance in the virgin birth. Our minister inferred that total belief wasn't necessary. Well then what was the point? Bear in mind that I was a pathetically simple minded little girl, intelligent but stupid in many ways, but this attitude bothered me.

But what did I know?

That was when I started considering myself a heretic. It was also the time I started to think about and research into what I did believe.

All these years later I am still thinking about it. I have the same problem many people have with religious language. Each word is so loaded. I use the words but they are modified in my mind to something more useful to me. How else can you be a believer and still be true to whatever 'it' is? So what is 'it'? Is there an 'it'? I tend to think 'spirit'. My little mind can barely conceive of my own small experience as a human alive on this earth, so I am not equipped to describe 'god' or 'spirit'. All I can do is to consider my own experiences and the experiences described by other people, and to try to find a comfortable position within them.

Any 'church' is a collection of people following what are essentially man-made 'rules' that the followers may or may not agree with. But what I love about the New Zealand Friends is that we all have our own thoughts and philosophies about 'it', and generally follow particular but similar paths in our 'religious philosophy/ philosophy of life' without insisting that our paths are the only right ones. None of us are heretics!

We have our own experiences in connecting with the 'spirit', we have books of faith and practice with examples of other people's experiences. We have guidance from advices and queries and our fellows. We have in Meeting for Worship a place to be with others while we individually listen and open our minds and hearts to spirit. We have all the experience of the world and the humans of the world to inspire us.

All that sounds very 'airy'. I am writing from the perspective of a person who is not able to conceive of the existence of our world, universe, without some spirit enlivening it. I have tried when I have been in a greatly enraged state. I've tried when I've been distressed and depressed. But the spirit is still there when I come more to myself.

The spirit is there in the sunrise, in the beauty of flowers, in the hand of the artist, in the voice of the singer. The spirit is there in the people who labour to help others, to help animals and birds and the earth. The spirit is there in all that suffers.

The Sufi mystic Rumi said,

*May the beauty we love*

*Be what we do*

*Yours in friendship*

*Carril Karr*



*Spur winged plover,  
Acrylic, 2020  
Karr*

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

*Any person who finds the fundamental Quaker testimonies and the Quaker way of life, with its emphasis on sincerity and simplicity, compatible with his or her philosophy of life is welcome to join the Fellowship.*

*If you wish to make a donation to the WQF—*

To make a donation on line, the YM Kiwi bank account number is 38 9001 0669022 02. Be sure to put your name and that the donation is for Wider Quaker Fellowship in the reference spaces. For a tax donation certificate email: [ymtreasurer@quaker.org.nz](mailto:ymtreasurer@quaker.org.nz) with the amount and date of the donation and your name and address.

Kiwi bank has stopped accepting cheques if you don't do internet banking you will need to deposit any donation directly into the YM account at a Kiwibank branch.

## COMING EVENTS

### YEARLY MEETING 2021—

Registrations are now open for **Yearly Meeting 2021** to be held at El Rancho, Waikanae from 14th to 17th May 2021, hosted by Kāpiti and Palmerston North Monthly Meetings.

The schedule for seminars at the Whanganui Quaker Settlement has not come to hand yet. For up to date information check the website: [quakers.nz](http://quakers.nz)