



Thoughts, Poems and Reflections in a Time of Pandemic. Number 12: Stones in My Pocket

At the present time the news is dominated by two things, the rapidly increasing number of deaths from the Corona Virus Pandemic and the disruption it creates. The social isolation forces us in on ourselves and makes us face up to our personal thoughts, fears, and challenges that we might otherwise have hidden away. In these "*Thoughts, Poems and Reflections in a time of Pandemic*". I describe some of these, and how through facing them we may find fulfilment in the lives we seek

The idea for this poem came from a meditation exercise where we were given three stones to consider. It examines three different facades we may present in our lives, but by choosing the one who most fully acknowledges our weaknesses, strengths and abilities we may best find fulfilment in the beliefs we possess and in the ways in which we conduct our lives.

STONES IN MY POCKETS

In my pockets three stones rest
And give my journey's path I see
In pictures gained within my mind
Which shine in meditation bound
To share their stories true to me.

The first finds granite sharply set
Impelling shape to roughened face
With darkest speckles shining forth
That set in clouded pale shorn rock
Forces form and strength to base.

The second stone I'd now peruse
Well rounded, shiny, water dashed.
Brings time and tide to shape its life
That seeks its place by outer show
Of perfect faces impact-smashed.

The third stone in my pocket now
Has faces shaped by wind and sea
To furrowed hump of dull faced rock
As through its length a crevice runs
To tell us what this stone must be.

Each nugget formed of self I built
Shines like one crystal in its stone
With each one building on the last
They link with granite rock to bind
And sculpt the self beneath I own.

The second stone that I possess
Becomes the self of outside view
I make to match what others want
In chiselled smoothness it impels
To hide from selfhood I'd pursue.

My third stone sets in all its faults
Those features that I wish to hide
But channels opened will disclose
A fitting shape and depth to carve
Foundations that I would provide.

For this stone is the cornerstone
That can match to other's shape
Its roughness too will find the key
To give the mortar binding power
For selfhoods tower I can create.

This is the stone of honest truth
Giving strength to towers I'll build
So with a structure bound to rock
Of matching base on which it sits
The self it sculpts will be fulfilled.

For this is stone we all must use
Each time we raise a future tower
As from foundations to the heights
Its shape invests its total strength
In structures built on who we are.

We must not build in walls of rock
Made alone with unmatched stone
For conflict from their inner shapes
Directs concern to inward thought
Crushing outreach we would own.

Yet buildings must not only shine
Reflecting light from outside walls
For mirrors set with polished stone
Then focus on the outward theme
That must subdue our inner calls.

So if we'll build with faulted stone
The stone the builders may reject
We use forgiveness and our care
To craft in strength so every rock
Can shape the building we erect.

Then in our pockets every stone
Is valued in the church we'll build
To welcome each of every shape
In love that tells of care and hope
So life by joy and peace is filled.

For in a house we shape by love
Our trust will build the inner tower
Where all take in life's fullest view
To gain by grace the self esteem
That makes us true to all we are.

Then of our building look around
Examine all those stones you see
And if this gives a welcome place
For every person life has shaped
So there God's love may truly be.

12 March 2006.

REFLECTION

At the outset I was not certain about what the purpose and outcome of putting this set of poems together would be. It reflects my own journey and the poems reflect my experiences along the way. Like a *"Pilgrim's Progress"* it describes some of the issues I have encountered and how I have tried to resolve their demands. Perhaps this poem *"Stones in My Pocket"* summarises what I have learnt. It is about being able to be who we are, not to be what other people expect of us, and not to condemn or be condemned for other people for what we are not. We are not to be like the housewife of the polished stone who seeks to maintain standards which she believes are expected of her by others and, are impossible to maintain: That is no matter how worthy those standards are. On the other hand we are not to simply be the stone of unshaped granite which falls victim to our own fears and concerns which, like the woman with her elastoplast taped eyes, who is unjustly condemned by others and is someone who faces great anger and distress. The third stone with all its faults is one which reflects upon how we make use of our talents and our responsibilities both to ourselves and to others, in ways which reveal the truth of who we are, not in terms of any success we achieve, but in the ways we commit ourselves to living our lives.

In the poem I compare the sense of selfhood to a tower we create which grows taller as our lives progress. However, the tower's stability depends on the strength of its foundation. If its foundations are weak or not correctly set, the tower will collapse. This story of course is comparable to the parable of Jesus who talks about a house built on sand which will fall down, and one built on rock which will not. In this analogy, as the tower grows taller it will be more prone to collapse. Yet this

third stone, the stone of honest truth: *“the faulted stone, the stone the builders may reject”* is the one that builds the strongest tower. The last verse in the poem states *“Then of our building look around, examine all those stones you see, and if this gives a welcome place for every person life has shaped, so there God’s love may truly be”*. That is the richness we should expect. I break with convention in the way I deal with my own issues, yet through this journey I know that I am accepted for being who I am when I live my life in a way that is true to my own identity and without any diminution of the moral standards and responsibilities I possess. See the poem on Anger (No 7) for a description of some of the issues I have had to face. Reaching this understanding has not been easy, and these poems describe the various trials I have encountered. These experiences led me to question my own sense of identity. The failure to obtain this sense of acceptance has destroyed the lives for many in the same situation, for it strikes in the same way at the foundation stone upon which our towers of selfhood are built... failure of the foundation leads to failure of the tower and that too easily leads to total and catastrophic collapse.

We have seen that one effect of the current corona virus pandemic and the consequent lockdown, is that of depriving everyone of social interaction. The loss of communication, income, and lack of interaction with family, friends and others, throws us into a world of worry, anxiety uncertainty, social and economic deprivation, loneliness, and isolation, where the possibility of our own deaths seems closer than we might otherwise expect. A major concern is the harm that this will do to our abilities to interact with others after the lockdown ends. Medical practitioners and researchers are already predicting that there will be major long term effects on mental health which will last for years to come. My first response is to say that it is OK to have these feelings. Accept them and use them to build the strongest tower. None of us are perfect, no one should expect us to be perfect and if Christianity plays an important part in your lives you will be aware of the passage in Matthew 21:42. *“Then Jesus asked them, “Didn’t you ever read this in the Scriptures? ‘The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is wonderful to see”*

So, in our building look around, examine all those stones you see, and if this gives a welcome place, for every person life has shaped then, there God’s love may truly be. According to our own beliefs we ask or pray that we may be able to welcome everyone equally in our lives. We ask or pray that all of us without exception may find this love and light in our lives. We ask or pray that we are accepted and loved for who we are. That in the whole of society with all its diversity we may use the stones of many types to build a welcome for all, with this full inclusion wholly in place in our communities, in our societies, and in all the world.

The complete collection of reflections is available is available at: www.com.tqdr.co.uk/articles/001C-PandemicThoughts.pdf