**The importance of being social**

**[Atle Hetland](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/atle-hetland)**

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Mark Twain (1835-1910), the famous American writer, humourist and entrepreneur, wrote in 1867 that God made war so that Americans could learn world geography. True, the US has been involved in over a hundred military actions and wars, none of them on its own territory since then. But I am not sure that people in the country with half a hundred sub-states, which are as big as many countries, have become better in geography in the one hundred and fifty years since Mark Twain said what I said. Americans don’t really need to travel outside their own land and continent to feel they know the world, and they feel self-sufficient as it is. When the wealthy George W Bush became president in 2001, he had undertaken very few international travels, well, being a Texan, he knew Mexico and he spoke Spanish fluently, it was said.

I believe one important change in my lifetime is that we now know more about the rest of the world. When I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, we had limited knowledge of the outside world and we had stereotype opinions about ourselves and the world, especially the world outside Europe and North America. However, Norway was and still is one of the largest shipping nations in the world, so we knew the names of many port cities and perhaps also where the fifty or so seamen’s churches could be found. Norway had for long sent Christian missionaries to Africa, Asia, Japan, and elsewhere. Almost every Norwegian family had relatives in America, ancestors of about one third of the Norwegian population who had emigrated to the US over the hundred-year period from 1825-1925, and some also to Australia and South Africa. One could say we were quite similar to Kashmiris, Gujratis and other Pakistanis today, who have relatives abroad, including a high number of foreign workers, especially in the Middle-East and Europe.

[NATO chief rules out talks on European security without Europeans](https://nation.com.pk/08-Jan-2022/nato-chief-rules-out-talks-on-european-security-without-europeans)

When we travel and live away from home, we learn about other people. Of course, we can also learn through reading, seeing films, talking with people from elsewhere, reading letters, and more. We don’t have to travel to learn, and sometimes in my childhood, I thought that adults who had not travelled much, still had a lot of knowledge about faraway places and other people, simply they had taken time to reflect on what they had read, trying to imagine how life would be in those places. Today, we may be too quick, getting a lot of information, but not taking the necessary time to reflect and think, thus in actual fact learning and understanding little. Besides, many times, much of the information we get is similar or identical, and what we learn may also not be quite correct and accurate, but include prejudices and misunderstandings.

In their New Year’s speeches, the King and Prime Minister of my home country, Norway, Harald V (84) and Jonas Gahr Støre (61), reminded us of the importance of seeing other people, showing empathy and trying to feel with those who are different, or for that matter, similar to ourselves. The King said that we should take out the best cups, the best tea or coffee set, and invite those we love and are close to, or even those we see more rarely. In a way, we should learn to count our days and realise that none of us has unlimited time and opportunities to see each other, hence we must rather do it now than wait till another day.

[Murree closed for all types traffic due to heavy snow, traffic](https://nation.com.pk/08-Jan-2022/govt-halts-tourists-closed-for-all-types-traffic-due-to-heavy-snow-rush-of-tourists)

The Corona pandemic has reminded us of how important contact with others is, and that none of us can be happy on an island, in a mountain town, or in a desert oasis, away from others, or in a city apartment not even finding time and reason to talk to our next door neighbours. It doesn’t take many days in quarantine and isolation away from classmates, work colleagues, friends and relatives, before we feel lonely and miss everyone, and to our surprise, perhaps also those we thought we didn’t like and could live without.

The Internet and social media have made us communicate easily with people everywhere as if they live just across the street. Alas, we have become superficial and standardised in what we say to each other, and the old-fashioned and slower communication might have been better, especially to get deeper understanding. Yet, the casual and fearless ways of talking to each other are better today than before.

During the Corona years, schools and universities have been closed or had serious restrictions, making life and social learning difficult for all, indeed the young ones. In some countries, figures show an alarming high percentage of various kinds of abuse in the home, indicating everyone’s frustration. We often talk about education as the knowledge and skills that students learn; I believe only some of that is important, what is important is the social learning and exchange among peers and adults. The famous UNESCO report from 2001, chaired by Jacques Delors, emphasised four pillars of education, namely: Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Live and Learning to Be. The social aspects of education were key, and now during the last two years, that students have had less opportunity to be social, we have begun to realise that; we begin to see that it is less important that students miss out on some facts and figures, but indeed important if the social intelligence is stunted and the ability to reason, debate, and draw own conclusions is not given room to develop. To exchange ideas on the Internet is okay and it has some value, too, but it cannot replace real exchange and communication.

[PSL 7 to be Shahid Afridi's last one? Hafeez, Kamran, Tahir, Weise's too?](https://nation.com.pk/08-Jan-2022/psl-7-to-be-shahid-afridi-s-last-one-hafeez-kamran-tahir-weise-s-too)

Mark Twain had a unique ability to tell stories, pinpoint issues, and say things that make us think, whether it is exact and true what he says, or rather to make us continue making and telling the stories, and pondering on our own ideas, dreams, and solutions. Albert Einstein (1879-1955) said that we should read a fairytale to a child, and when we had done that, we should read another one. Then the child would become more creative and clever.

If we travel, we learn, if we read and talk, we learn, also if we chat on social media, and so on. My main point today was that we should realise how important it is that we are social, that we never close a debate, never think that we have reached the mountaintop and final destiny. No country has reached the eternal and everlasting democracy and ways of debating and finding solutions. That would be a stale and undemocratic place. Foreign workers, immigrants, letter writers and professional writers, and all the rest, have taught us that it is through talking and communicating that we learn, and it is through being challenged, too, and praised, that we think and move ahead. Corona has taught us a lot, including some of these aspects—and then we may wish there were easier ways of learning it, but let us make the best out of it the way the world is. Let us stubbornly be social and keep communicating.