



# Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker

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**Location:** Netherlands



**What I do:** Living a life of mission, both locally in our community and globally as I support Christian leaders in Africa and Asia to resource others.

Dear friends, greetings from Malaysia!

What happens when 25 people from 10 different countries in Asia come together to reflect on what it means to be part of God's mission in this world? What does it mean to speak about salvation and liberation in this broken world?

During the month of June the Seminari Teoloji Malaysia organised the Asia Gateway programme, a study programme for leaders in mission from Asia who work cross-culturally within Asia. The participants came from Nepal, Pakistan, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia. As you can imagine, this was already in itself a multicultural group, especially when you realise that the people from India already came from very different regions and contexts within the country. Where in some places, for example in Kerala, it is possible to practice the Christian faith freely, the experience of the participants coming from Odisha (Orissa) is very different. They tell stories of meeting in small groups and different houses each time in order to avoid suspicion and opposition in the neighbourhood.



*Visiting a temple where three religions/philosophies – Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian – are combined in one place of worship*

I was asked to teach on Gospel, Culture, and Integral Mission. During our discussions participants raised questions such as: "How can I pray for the military government while I also see how much suffering they cause, how they oppress, imprison and even kill our people?", "How can we help people whose only access to water is from a river that is polluted by a chemical factory?" and "How can we speak of the love of God and salvation, about God's new world, while people suffer and go hungry because of unjust economic structures and abusive governments?"

Again and again we came back to what is stated in the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission (2001):

It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. [...] If we ignore the world we betray the word of God, which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together.

But what is the good news in relationships and communities, in the daily life of the many different people in Asia? We realised that the answer to this question can never be found within the safety of a classroom. Of course, I had prepared the module well and did my utmost in teaching and communicating that which I had prepared. But I am convinced that the deepest learning during this programme happened in the living and sharing together.

Throughout the month-long programme, we ate together, prayed together, shared our stories and life experiences, had fun and cried together. We did the laundry and went shopping with each other. We visited a couple of Christian communities and also places of worship from different religions. We visited a community where people of different diasporas, both legal and illegal, come together for mutual support and learning.

**Support Berdine van den Toren-Lekkerkerker:**  
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**With Jesus  
With each other  
To the edges**



Because we lived together in such an intense way, we got to know each other in all our diversities, culturally as well as personally. This enriched our conversations. Our communities, our children, our joys and anxieties, our stories and our hopes – they all became an integral part of our reflections. We learned with and from each other, precisely because we are all so different and carry so many experiences with us. In the listening and sharing, deeper questions arose, but broader wisdom was also found. We did not learn about each other, but experienced together a learning and formation that included all areas of life.

**At the end of the module the participants read a poem to express their learning – a poem in two voices:**

**Shalom?**

**God looks down on a broken world.  
Creation, groaning, in pain.  
Unheard, ignored, seen, in part.**

**Shalom?**

**God who walked among us,  
Strolling through the gardens that  
he created for his people  
Sharing laughter and conversation  
of the peace that he longed to share.**

**Shalom?**

**What is Shalom?**

*Shalom!*

*Loving God – knowing him.  
Creation singing to his glory, together.  
Knowing his love is for ALL of  
CREATION.*

*Shalom!*

*Humankind as humankind –  
undivided.  
Embracing the colours of their skin, as  
threads of a tapestry.  
Languages that unite to sing one  
song of praise to the Creator.*

*Living in harmony, the songs of their  
souls creating a symphony.*

*Shalom!*

*Does it mean love?  
For the man who caused the wound  
that hasn't healed, as well as the one  
who was hurt?  
For the woman who cries in darkness,  
desperate for a way out of her  
troubles?  
For the child that wanders through  
the streets, wondering where justice  
lies?*

*Shalom! It also means love*

*For the land that aches under the  
exploitation that has left it colourless  
For the tears of the oceans that watch  
their inhabitants wash ashore with no  
oxygen.  
For the trees of the earth that fall to  
the ground, uprooted, undone?*

**Shalom?**

**Can there really be peace?  
Can we help heal the world of the  
pain that it is weighed under?**

**Is it not our place to embrace its  
needs and protect our home?  
Do we have a choice?  
Can we choose Shalom?**

*Shalom!*

*In God, there is Shalom.  
In understanding his people.  
In loving them as Christ did.  
Wanting to know them as he does.  
In letting the Spirit move us to be  
instruments of restoration.  
In us, we seek Shalom!*

*(Poem written by Daniella Varghese during  
a group activity at the end of the module  
Gospel, Culture, and Integral Mission.  
Performed by Daniella and others during  
Asia Gateway 2023.)*

Will you pray with me for each of the participants, for  
their families, communities and ministries?

With love, Berdine



**Photos from top to bottom:** Eating together as part of living and learning, sharing our lives together; visiting an urban farm that was started in support of the migrant communities; praying with and for each other; group activity on the campus of Seminari Theoloji Malaysia



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