

## **Introduction**

In the spring of 2021, the Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Sustainable Development organized three sessions titled 'Freedom in Lockdown: Keep the fire burning!'. Targeted at students, these events aimed to create space for participants to discuss their experiences and insights during the second lockdown. Despite the good news about vaccines at the beginning of the year, the end of lockdown is not yet in sight. Though we might be done with corona, corona is not done with us. How do we keep going? How do we keep the fire burning?

During the online events students gathered with representatives from the Executive Board of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam to discuss questions such as what does this period bring us, where do we find hope, and what do we need during this time?

## **Summary**

Each session included live music and inspiring words of wisdom from different wisdom traditions. The first centered around Naw-Rúz (celebration of new year in the Bahá'í tradition), the second around Pesach and Easter, and the third one around Ramadan. Representatives from these different religious traditions were able to connect some of their rituals and practices such as meditation and fasting to what we experience in these times of lockdown. Slowing down, being limited in one's abilities, making space for reflection, gratitude, and patience. Realizing what is important and actively making time for those things, the people in our lives and the relationships.

In all three sessions, students shared similar stories about their experiences of the last year so far. A recurring theme was the importance of mental health: having the time to slow down and make time for personal reflection has contributed to awareness of mental health and personal development. Something that the students hope to take with them also when the lockdown is lifted, and life returns to normal.

## **Recommendations and next steps**

The sessions also asked students in breakout groups to think about the question 'what do you need' – and, more specifically, what could the VU do to support students during this time. The students shared how especially for international students their new life in Amsterdam can be quite lonely. With online classes it is more difficult to meet students and create some social contact in this city. This stands in stark contrast to Dutch students who might have their family nearby or an already existing network to rely on. There is a clear need for more (offline) activities that help students to make time for fun and the opportunity to connect with others.

One example of such an activity that is already ongoing is the 'Life is better in 3D' initiative organized by 3D, the debate center of the VU. The center opens its doors a few times a week to allow students to meet up with fellow students and play board games. Creating this offline contact is much appreciated by the students.