

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

<http://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/friends-beliefs-and-practices/worship-and-the-meeting-for-worship/>

Worship and the Meeting for Worship

The meeting for worship is the heart of the Religious Society of Friends. It draws us together in the enlightening and empowering presence of God, sending us forth with renewed vision and commitment.

Worship

Our word “worship” has its roots in the concept of “worth-ship.” Worship is our response to what we feel to be of ultimate importance. Our expression of that feeling of ultimate worship may take many forms. Worship is always possible, alone or in company, in silence, in music or speech, in stillness or in dance. It is never confined to place or time or form.

When Friends worship, we reach out from the depths of our being to God, the giver of life and of the world around us. Our worship is the search for communion with God and the offering of ourselves—body and soul—for the doing of God’s will. The sense of worship can be experienced in the awe we feel in the silence of a meeting for worship or in the awareness of our profound connectedness to nature and its power. In worship we know repentance and forgiveness in the acknowledgment of God as the ultimate source of our being, and the serenity of accepting God’s will.

In worship we discover direction for our lives and the uses of our resources. Leadings are often made clearer by reference to the life and teachings of Jesus and by the transforming power of the Inner Light. From worship there comes a fresh understanding of the two great commandments: to love “your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27¹).

Careful listening to the Inward Teacher can lead to fresh openings: an inpouring of love, insight, and interdependence. True listening can also bring the worshiper to new and sometimes troubling perceptions, including clear leadings that may be a

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¹ **Luke 10:27** (NRSV) He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

source of pain and anxiety; yet it can also bring such wholeness of heart that hard tasks can become a source of joy. Even when we worship torn with our own pain or that of another, it is in worship that we discover new strength for what faces us in our everyday lives.

Each experience of worship is different. There is no right way to prepare for spiritual communion, no set practice to follow when worship grows from expectant waiting in the Spirit. Vital worship depends far more on a deeply felt longing for God than upon any particular practice. “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7²)

The Meeting for Worship

Friends find it useful to come to meeting with hearts and minds prepared for worship by daily prayer, meditation, and study, especially of the Bible and of the experience of others. We deepen thereby our awareness of the wonder of God and of God’s love, and acquire the words with which to understand and to express that awareness. Many also find help through thoughtful reflection and listening to the Inward Teacher in the course of daily life and service.

As Friends arrive for meeting, such preparation helps us set aside our preoccupation with ourselves and our affairs and so settle into worship in a manner described by Alexander Parker in 1660:

The first that enters into the place of your meeting ... turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong. Then the next that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait in the light. Those who are brought to a pure still waiting upon God in the Spirit are come nearer to the Lord than words are; for God is spirit and in the spirit he is worshiped.

Worship in meeting may thus begin with stilling the mind and body, letting go of tensions and everyday worries, feeling the encompassing presence of others, and opening oneself to the Spirit. It may include meditation, reflection on a remembered passage from the Bible or other devotional literature, silent prayer, thanksgiving, praise of God, consideration of one’s actions, remorse, request for

² **Matthew 7:7** (NRSV) Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

forgiveness, or search for direction. Even in times of spiritual emptiness, Friends find it useful to be present in worship.

Worshiping together strengthens the members of the worshiping community and deepens the act of worship itself. Such communal worship is like a living organism whose individual but interdependent members are essential to one another and to the life of the greater whole. It is like the luminous unity and individual fulfillment that arise when musicians, responding to the music before them, offer up their separate gifts in concert. Friends sometimes use Paul’s image and speak of the meeting for worship as a body whose head is Christ (I Cor. 12:27³). The gifts and participation of each member are important in maintaining and enriching the spiritual life of the meeting for worship.

There is a renewal of spirit when we turn away from worldly matters to rediscover inward serenity. Friends know from experience the validity of Jesus’ promise that “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20⁴). Often we realize our hopes for a heightened sense of the presence of God through the cumulative power of group worship, communicated in silent as well as vocal ministry. When we experience such a profound and evident sense of oneness with God and with one another, we speak of a “gathered” or “covered” meeting for worship.

Communion and Communication

Direct communion with God constitutes the essential life of the meeting for worship. Into its living stillness may come leadings and fresh insights that are purely personal, not meant to be shared. At other times they are meant for the Meeting at large to hear.

When a leading is to be shared, the worshiper feels a compelling inward call to vocal ministry. The very name “Quaker” is by tradition derived from the evident quaking of early Friends witnessing under the power of the Spirit. Though ministry is seldom accompanied by such outward signs, some still feel the inward quaking. Vocal ministry may take many forms, as prayer, praise of God, song, teaching, witnessing, or sharing. These messages may center upon a single, vital theme; often apparently unrelated

³ **1st Corinthians 12:27** (NRSV) Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

⁴ **Matthew 18:20** (NRSV) For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

leadings are later discovered to have an underlying unity. Such ministry and prayer may answer the unrecognized or unvoiced needs of other seekers.

When someone accepts the call of the Spirit to speak, fellow worshipers are likewise called to listen with openness of minds and hearts. Diffident and tender spirits should feel the Meeting community's loving encouragement to give voice, even if haltingly, to the message that may be struggling to be born within them. Friends whose thought has been long developing and whose learning and experience are profound serve the meeting best when they, like all others, wait patiently for the prompting of the Inward Teacher. Anyone moved to speak following another should first allow others to absorb and respond inwardly to what has already been said.

Friends should not put obstacles in the way of the call, whether by deciding in advance to speak or not to speak, or by feeling a duty to speak to provide some balance between silence and the spoken word. Even if not a word is spoken, meetings for worship can be profoundly nurturing.

Hindrances to Worship

All present should remember that spiritual opportunities entail responsibilities as well, including attention to the time of assembling and consideration for those already settled. Speaking carried on in a spirit of debate or lecturing or discussion is destructive to the life of the meeting for worship and of the meeting community. It is rarely helpful to answer or rebut what has been said previously. Friends moved to vigorous support of causes need to find brief and sensitive ways to voice their insights. Similar sensitivity should be practiced by those who bring material to be posted or shared during worship. Any who habitually settle into silent reading or sit in inattentive idleness cut themselves off from their fellow worshipers and from the pervasive reach of the Spirit. If hindrances to worship occur within a meeting for worship, members of Worship and Ministry or others as appropriate should move quickly and in love to provide counsel.

In Closing

Friends gather for worship in quiet waiting upon God. We come together out of our care for one another and out of our shared hunger to know God, to follow the leading of the Spirit, to feel with clarity our shortcomings and the reality of forgiveness, to give voice

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

to our anguish, faith, praise, joy, and thanksgiving. At the close of the meeting for worship, we shake hands in acknowledgment of our commitment to one another and to God, and go forth with renewed trust in the power and reality of God's grace and love.

<http://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/extracts-from-the-writings-of-friends/worship/>

Worship

Introduction

Worship is the foundation for spiritual life and renewal in the Religious Society of Friends. The selections that follow address the distinctive character of Friends communal worship and the forms of ministry to which it gives rise. These selections include practical advice regarding how to prepare for and settle into worship as well as broader statements regarding the meaning and significance of our form of worship. Selections have been gathered into four groups: Worship; Prayer; the Scriptures, Jesus, Inward Teacher; Discernment and Guidance.

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45

The first that enters into the place of your meeting...turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong. Then the next that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait in the light.... Those who are brought to a pure still waiting upon God in the spirit, are come nearer to the Lord than words are; for God is a spirit, and in the spirit is he worshiped.... In such a meeting there will be an unwillingness to part asunder, being ready to say in yourselves, it is good to be here; and this is the end of all words and writings—to bring people to the eternal living Word.

—Alexander Parker, 1660

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

46

We earnestly advise all who attend our meetings to lift their hearts to God immediately on taking their seats. The avoidance of distracting conversation beforehand is a great help to this end, and the walk to meeting may often prove a true preparation for divine worship....

The meeting affects the ministry quite as truly as the ministry affects the meeting. If those who come together do so in expectant faith, and in genuine love and sympathy with one another, striving to put far from them thoughts of criticism and fault-finding, and praying earnestly that the right persons may be led to speak and the right messages be given, they will not go away unhelped. It is in such an atmosphere that the Holy Spirit can work effectively to bring forth the utterances that are needed, and to check those that are not required. On the other hand, the spirit of indifference or of cold and unfriendly criticism injures the whole life of the meeting, and we need not wonder if in such an atmosphere speakers mistake their guidance.

—Revision Committee, London Yearly Meeting, 1911

47

Observance of special days and times and use of special places for worship serve a helpful purpose in calling attention at regular intervals to our need for spiritual communion. They cannot, however, take the place of daily and hourly looking to God for guidance. Nor can any custom of fasting or abstaining from bodily comforts take the place of constant refraining from everything which has a tendency to unfit mind and body for being the temple of the Divine Spirit. The foundation for all our personal life and social relations should be the sufficient and irreplaceable consciousness of God.

—Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Race Street), 1927

48

There are times of dryness in our individual lives, when meeting may seem difficult or even worthless. At such times one may be tempted not to go to meeting; but it may be better to go, prepared to offer as our contribution to the worship simply a sense of need. In such a meeting one may not at the time realise what one has gained, but one will nevertheless come away helped.

—Ministry and Extension Committee, Berks and Oxon Quarterly

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

Meeting, London Yearly Meeting, 1958

49

For, when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart; and as I gave way unto it I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up; and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this power and life, whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed....

—Robert Barclay, 1678

50

And as many candles lighted, and put in one place, do greatly augment the light and make it more to shine forth; so when many are gathered together into the same life, there is more of the glory of God, and his power appears, to the refreshment of each individual, for that he partakes not only of the light and life raised in himself, but in all the rest.

—Robert Barclay, 1678

51

Yea, though there be not a word spoken, yet is the true spiritual worship performed, and the body of Christ edified; yea, it may, and hath often fallen out among us, that divers meetings have passed without one word; and yet our souls have been greatly edified and refreshed, and our hearts wonderfully overcome with the secret sense of God's power and Spirit, which without words hath been ministered from one vessel to another.

—Robert Barclay, 1677

52

When you come to your meetings...what do you do? Do you then gather together bodily only, and kindle a fire, compassing yourselves about with the sparks of your own kindling, and so please yourselves, and walk in the light of your own fire, and in the sparks which you have kindled...? Or rather, do you sit down in True Silence, resting from your own Will and Workings, and waiting upon the Lord, with your minds fixed in that Light wherewith Christ has enlightened you, until the Lord breathes life in you, refresheth you, and prepares you, and your spirits and souls, to make you fit for his service, that you may offer unto him a pure and spiritual sacrifice?

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

—William Penn, 1677

53

On one never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning, I found myself one of a small company of silent worshipers, who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence, unhindered at least, if not helped, by any human utterance. Utterance I knew was free, should the words be given; and before the meeting was over, a sentence or two were uttered in great simplicity by an old and apparently untaught man, rising in his place amongst the rest of us. I did not pay much attention to the words he spoke, and I have no recollection of their import. My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undisturbed opportunity for communion with God, with the sense that at last I had found a place where I might, without the faintest suspicion of insincerity, join with others in simply seeking His presence. To sit down in silence could at least pledge me to nothing; it might open to me (as it did that morning) the very gate of heaven.

—Caroline E. Stephen, 1890

54

Our worship is a deep exercise of our spirits before the Lord, which doth not consist in exercising the natural part or natural mind, either to hear or speak words, or in praying according to what we, of ourselves, can apprehend or comprehend concerning our needs; but we wait, in silence of the fleshly part, to hear with the new ear what God shall please to speak inwardly in our own hearts, or outwardly through others, who speak with the new tongue which he unlooseth and teacheth to speak; and we pray in the spirit, and with a new understanding, as God pleaseth to quicken, draw forth, and open our hearts towards himself.

—Isaac Penington, 1661

55

He that lets his mind be ungoverned out of meeting, cannot set it so right as it should be when he comes into one; and such as get not forward in their spiritual journey when in meeting, it's certain they will go backwards when out of them.

—John Bellers, 1703

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

56

True worship may be experienced at any time; in any place—alone on the hills or in the busy daily life—we may find God, in whom we live and move and have our being. But this individual experience is not sufficient, and in a meeting held in the Spirit there is a giving and receiving between its members, one helping another with or without words. So there may come a wider vision and a deeper experience.

—Revision Committees, London Yearly Meeting, 1925 and 1994

57

The whole fellowship of disciples without distinction of sex or of official position are called to be priests, and to each one may be given some work of ministry. Our common worship must give opportunities for this, and in our experience we have found that in waiting upon God in silence we have the freedom and opportunity for such ministry and also for a deep experience of communion.

—T. Edmund Harvey, 1937

58

Meeting for worship can be more than just an occasion on which one's private religious needs are satisfied. Silent devotion should lead to an awareness that the meeting is less and less a place we choose ourselves, and more and more a place to which, out of love, God has called us. To understand this is to sense the meaning of those lovely phrases about the community of faith being the body of Christ.

—John Punshon, 1987

59

In a truly covered meeting an individual who speaks takes no credit to himself for the part he played in the unfolding of the worship.... For the feeling of being a pliant instrument of the Divine Will characterizes true speaking “in the Life.” Under such a covering an individual emerges into vocal utterance, frequently without fear and trembling, and subsides without self-consciousness into silence when his part is played. For One who is greater than all individuals has become the meeting place of the group, and He becomes the leader and director of worship. With wonder one hears the next speaker, if there be more, take up another aspect of the theme of the meeting. No jealousy, no regrets that he didn't think of saying that,

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

but only gratitude that the angel has come and troubled the waters and that many are finding healing through the one Life. A gathered meeting is no place for the enhancement of private reputations, but for self-effacing pliancy and obedience to the whispers of the Leader.

—Thomas Kelly, 1945

60

How does a Quaker Meeting work? Its foundation is the conviction that God is not a distant remote being but a living presence to be discovered in the deep centre of every human being....

The Quaker experience is that, in the silence, as we are open to one another in love, we help each other by sharing our strengths and weaknesses. The Quaker conviction is that as we go deeper into ourselves we shall eventually reach a still, quiet centre. At this point two things happen simultaneously. Each of us is aware of our unique value as an individual human being, and each of us is aware of our utter interdependence on one another.

—George Gorman, 1982

61

As Catholic worship is centered in the altar and Protestant worship in the sermon, worship for the Society of Friends attempts to realize as its center the divine Presence revealed within. In a Catholic church the altar is placed so as to become the focus of adoration; in a typical Protestant church the pulpit localizes attention; while in a Friends Meeting House there is no visible point of concentration, worship being here directed neither toward the actions nor the words of others, but toward the inward experience of the gathered group.

—Howard Brinton, 1952

62

A concern for the fellow-worshippers of our meetings which leads us to find the necessary time to know them, to visit them, to have them in our homes, and to make their needs our concern is a tested preparation for ministry of the highest importance. A person who throughout the week thinks of the approaching meeting for worship and holds up inwardly some of the needs of those who attend, is being prepared for that kind of participation in the meeting for worship that may open the way for helpful ministry. Ministry is often deepened by our natural exposure to those in greatest need,

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

whether it be physical need, as in a constant visiting of the poor, of those in prison, of those whom group prejudice segregates; or to the poor in spirit, those who face mental turmoil and inner problems. Few who feel this kind of responsible love for the meeting do not in the course of the week find some experience, some insight, something they have read that has helped them, some crushing burden they know some member or some group is bearing which they have held up to the Light, without these things appearing as seeds out of which ministry could grow.

—Douglas Steere, 1955

63

The Society of Friends can make its greatest contribution to community by continuing to be a religious society—I mean by centering on the practice of a corporate worship which opens itself to continuing revelation. Again, community is simply too difficult to be sustained by our social impulses. It can be sustained only as we return time and again to the religious experience of the unity of all life. To put it in the language of Friends, community happens as that of God in you responds to that of God in me. And the affirmation that there is that of God in every person must mean more than “I’m okay, you’re okay.”

The silence of the Quaker meeting for worship can be an experience of unity. I am an orthodox, garden variety Christian; I find the image of God first in Jesus the Christ. But it is my joy in the silent meeting to seek with those who find different ways to express the inexpressible truths of religious experience. Words can divide us, but the silence can bring us together. Whatever kinds of community the world needs, it surely needs the kind that embraces human diversity.

Parker J. Palmer, 1977

64

Worship is a hunger of the human soul for God. When it really occurs, it is as compelling as the hunger for food. It is as spontaneous as the love of boy for girl. If we feel it, no one needs to tell us we should worship. No one has to try to make us do it. If we do not feel it, or have no desire to feel it, no amount of urging or forcing will do any good. We simply cannot be forced from the outside to worship. Only the power within us, the life within, can move us to it.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

—N. Jean Toomer, 1947

65

I have never lost the enjoyment of sitting in silence at the beginning of meeting, knowing that everything can happen, knowing the joy of utmost surprise; feeling that nothing is preordained, nothing is set, all is open. The light can come from all sides. The joy of experiencing the Light in a completely different way than one has thought it would come is one of the greatest gifts that Friends' meeting for worship has brought me.

—Ursula Franklin, 1979

66

As I silence myself I become more sensitive to the sounds around me, and I do not block them out. The songs of the birds, the rustle of the wind, children in the playground, the roar of an airplane overhead are all taken into my worship. I regulate my breathing as taught me by my Zen friends, and through this exercise I feel the flow of life within me from my toes right through my whole body. I think of myself like the tree planted by the “rivers of water” in Psalm 1⁵, sucking up God’s gift of life and being restored. Sometimes I come to meeting for worship tired and weary, and I hear the words of Jesus, “Come unto me, all that labour and are weary, and I will give you rest.” And having laid down my burden, I feel refreshed both physically and spiritually. This leads me on to whole-hearted adoration and thanksgiving for all God’s blessings. My own name, Tayeko, means “child of many blessings” and God has surely poured them upon me. My heart overflows with a desire to give Him something in return. I have nothing to give but my own being, and I offer Him my thoughts, words, and actions of each day, and whisper, “Please take me as I am.”

—Tayeko Yamanouchi, 1980

67

I think it’s extremely important that we learn to listen. Listening is a lost art. And when I say learn to listen I mean listen to our spouses, listen to our children, listen to our fellow believers in our communities of faith. But I also want us to learn to listen to God.

⁵ **Psalms 1:3** (NRSV) They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

I know from personal experience that God speaks through the Scriptures. He speaks through preaching. He speaks through friends. But He also speaks directly. We can know that, but we must make time and space and silence in our lives if we are to learn this in real ways and be the beneficiaries of His leading and His guidance directly. We are told in the 46th Psalm⁶, “Be still and know that I am God.” In another translation it says, “Stop fighting and know that I am God.”⁷ Let’s take time to listen to God.

—Kara Cole Newell, 1982

68

It is unfortunate that much formal training in ministry does not even recognize that... inward preparation exists. In our world of degrees, exams, and training programs, it is easy to forget that ministry is not primarily a task; it is a way of being in the world. It is living in relationship with God and being a witness to God. Ministry is being able to listen to the Word of God and thereby have a word of life to share with others. Fundamentally, we do not do ministry. We are ministers.

—Sandra Cronk, 1991

69

Meeting for worship—which includes troubled silences, pompous speechifying, and uncertain searchings, as well as clear leadings—has taught me that the difficult things are often the most fruitful. Reading the Bible is fruitful for me precisely because it challenges me to a deeper level of compassion, commitment, and understanding....

Once, for instance, I was reading the section on the woman at the well⁸, which I had previously dismissed as being one more miracle story. Jesus, I thought, was being credited with knowing the woman’s whole life story through mysterious means. But as I reread the passage it became clear to me that Jesus was not showing off—he was explaining to her that God could be worshiped anywhere, that there was Living Water which quenched the deep thirsts we have....

With this new understanding of reading, and this return to my

⁶ Psalms 46:10 (NRSV) “Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”

⁷ Psalms 46:10 (Good News Bible) “Stop fighting,” he says, “and know that I am God, supreme among the nations, supreme over the world.”

⁸ John 4:5-29

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

cultural roots, I can carry meeting for worship with me throughout the week and practice the concentration and love which I have found there.

—Molly Bishop, 1994

Prayer

70

The silence gives me time to center, sometimes using a few simple words, sometimes watching the play of sunlight on the floor. In the silence, I may simply go over what needs to be done for the week, or focus on concerns for friends, or worry through a problem. In the silent worship, space is there to hold these all up to God. Other times I am drawn into a sense of awareness of Presence, a place of comfort, or instruction, or prayer, or awe.

—Margery Post Abbott, 1995

71

Let none allow the rush of engagements or the hurry of business to crowd their opportunities for private retirement and waiting upon God. The more our engagements multiply, the greater is the call to watch unto prayer. He who is a stranger to prayer enters upon them in his own strength, and finds, to his unspeakable loss, that a life without prayer is a life practically without God.

—London Yearly Meeting, 1877

72

[Dig] deep, ...carefully cast forth the loose matter and get down to the rock, the sure foundation, and there hearken to the divine voice which gives a clear and certain sound.

—John Woolman, c. 1770

73

It came into my mind to write a prayer of my own composing, to use in the mornings. So I wrote a prayer, though I then could scarcely join my letters, I had so little a time learned to write....

The next prayer I wrote was for an assurance of pardon for my sins.... I felt how desirable a thing to be assured of the pardon of one's sins; so I wrote a pretty large prayer concerning it.

I felt a fear of being puffed up with praise, as several persons had praised me for the greatness of my memory, so I wrote a prayer

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

of thanks for the gift of memory and expressed my desires to use it to the Lord.

—Mary Proude Springett Penington, c. 1635

74

The place of prayer is a precious habitation.... I saw this habitation to be safe, to be inwardly quiet, when there was great stirrings and commotions in the world.

—John Woolman, 1770

75

In intercession we share with God our deepest desires for others.... We need constantly to remind ourselves that we can have no right desire for others in which God has not forestalled us. It was His desire before it was ours.... All intercession is self-offering, a self-giving, a longing that what we ask for others may be done, if need be, through ourselves.

—Edgar G. Dunstan, 1946

76

Do not let us be discouraged because we find the path of silent prayer difficult or because we do not experience that joy of conscious communion which is given to some. The sunlight shines through the cloud; even when the cloud is so thick that we cannot see the sun at all, its rays carry on their healing work, and it does us good to go out into the open, even on a grey day. The experience of many of the greatest saints points to the traversing of a dark night of the soul⁹ before the light of full communion dawns, and to times of dryness of spirit coming at intervals to test the faith and perseverance of the seeker.

—T. Edmund Harvey, 1929

77

The habit of turning instinctively to God at any moment of life is of immeasurable benefit to the mind and spirit. The entreaty of the moment may be for one's own strength, forgiveness, courage, or power to endure. It may be a petition for the wellbeing of another. It may be an involuntary expression of gratitude for joy or peace in one's own or another's life. Whatever the need, longing, or

⁹ See http://www.ccel.org/ccel/john_cross/dark_night.txt

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

aspiration, this instinctive prayer may take the form of silent communion, of petition in words, or something akin to intimate conversation.

—Agnes L. Tierney, c. 1930

78

There is a way of living in prayer at the same time that one is busy with the outward affairs of daily living. This practice of continuous prayer in the presence of God involves developing the habit of carrying on the mental life at two levels. At one level we are immersed in this world of time, of daily affairs. At the same time but at a deeper level of our minds, we are in active relation with the Eternal Life.

—Thomas Kelly, 1942

79

The highest purpose of prayer is to lift the soul into close companionship with God. Such prayer is not an attitude of the body; is not a formula of words. It is an impulse of the soul that often cannot express itself in words. In the midst of our busiest occupations, when hands and mind and heart are bent upon accomplishing the purpose of the hour, there may come a flash of divine illumination, flooding our souls with light, showing us how God is the center of all things, the life of all that lives. In that moment's deep revealing comes to us the secret of faith that need not question; of hope that foresees its own fulfilling; of strength that wearies not in the walk with God; of love whose beneficent impulses go out to all the needy, and sweeten all life's relationships; of peace that bears the soul upward to the regions of perpetual calm.

—Elizabeth Powell Bond, 1895

80

We would do well as Friends to acknowledge our indebtedness to the great religions other than Christianity as we search through the world's treasury for resources to sustain our prayer life.

—Elsie Landstrom, 1970

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

81

In prayer, the seeds of concern have a way of appearing. Often enough, a concern begins in a feeling of being personally liable, personally responsible, for someone or some event. With it there may come an intimation that one should do some little thing: speak to some person, make an inquiry into a certain situation, write a letter, send some money, send a book. Or it may be a stop in our minds about some pending decision, or a clear directive that now is not the time to rest, or an urge to stay home when we had been meaning to be away; it may be that no more than this will be given us. But this seed is given us to follow, and if we do not follow it, we cannot expect to see what may grow from it. Seeds, not fruit, are given in prayer, but they are given for planting.

—Douglas V. Steere, 1962

82

It is helpful to think that God is waiting for us to offer ourselves to him in the ministry of healing. Just as the remedies for many diseases had to wait on the development of medical science (through which we must believe that his Spirit is working), so in this service of intercession, results are waiting upon our obedience and readiness to do our part. Thus we shall come to know what it is to share in the fellowship of the Spirit, and become ‘workers together with God.’

—Frederick J. Tritton, 1958

83

When I read that I was supposed to make ‘a place for inward retirement and waiting upon God’ in my daily life, as the Queries in those days expressed it, I thought: “Oh, those stuffy old Friends, they don’t understand! Do they think I’m going to be able to sit for an hour, or half an hour, or a quarter of an hour, or for any time at all, in my very busy life, just to have some kind of feeling of ‘inward retirement?’” I felt irritated and misunderstood, and I tried to put the whole thing out of my mind. At last I began to realise...that I needed some kind of inner peace, or inward retirement, or whatever name it might be called by.... I began to realize that prayer was not a formality or an obligation; it was a place which was there all the time and always available.

—Elfrida Vipont Foulds, 1983

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

84

Prayer would be an evil rather than a blessing if it were only a way of getting God to do what we ourselves will not make the effort to do. God does not do things for us—he enables us to do them for ourselves.

—Elisabeth Holmgaard, 1984

85

Obviously, then, all the activities of a meeting—the prayer of worship, the vocal prayer of a gathered meeting, the prayer which sustains and nourishes its cells or prayer groups, family prayer, the ministry of love which expresses itself in counseling, the impact of a meeting on the outside community—all of these should be grounded in the prayer life of the individual. If prayer has not been a reality through the week for at least a core of its members, participants in the Sunday meeting cannot reach high levels of worship. Vocal prayer flows when the cup is already full before we come to meeting. Activity which is meaningful results from insights gained in prayer. Counseling which is helpful comes from the bringing of divine perspective to human confusion. Prayer, then, is a necessity in our lives. It must be at the center of them.

—Helen Hole, 1962

86

There were three separate occasions when heart-felt disturbances called me back to prayer. One was entirely joyful: sitting up in bed early one summer morning nursing my week-old first child, looking out on the sunshine and being swept into a feeling of miraculous oneness with all creation and able to thank a real God with the whole of my being.

The second was in great contrast. The winter after my husband's death, when I was physically stretched to the limit caring singlehanded for six young children and emotionally in a state of bleak torpor, I came across Simone Weil's *Waiting on God* and in a chapter called 'The love of God and affliction' recognised my own condition. I could not claim that I knew the worst that she, in her utterly clear and ruthless style, was describing, but it was near enough; and knowing that someone else recognised it brought a certain comfort. But most important, she showed a place for God in the shape of the crucified Christ, and part of my misery for some time had been the blank absence of any sense of the presence of

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

God....

The third experience, some years later, concerned a friend who was extremely ill. She was one of the few really good people I had ever known, and I saw her in great distress. When I reached home from the hospital I went to my room and tried to lay myself alongside her suffering and bring us both before God. In the depth of affliction I had sometimes felt like Job; now I found myself wrestling like Jacob¹⁰. This last episode began the process of break-up which led on by slow degrees to a time when I knew I had to try to pray again; not just in dire immediate need but as a basis for daily living.

—Joan Fitch, 1980

87

Now as the Father teacheth to pray, so he giveth desires or words (if he please) according to the present need. Sometimes he gives but ability to sigh or groan (if he gives no more he accepts that).... Now, if the prayer be in words, for there is praying without words, then it must be in those words which he pleaseth to give, from the sense which he kindleth, and not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, or would choose.

—Isaac Penington, c. 1665

88

The way to [submerge the individual self in the one eternal Self] ...is through prayer. Some Friends use a short and oft-repeated prayer or a mantra as an aid to concentration. Prayer often involves adoration, gratitude, and love. Passages from the Psalms, incidents in the life of Jesus, or sayings of spiritual leaders may be brought to mind, pondered and related to your life. Sometimes prayer takes the form of petition, not to tell God of your desires for He knows already nor to seek special favors for that would be impossible, but to set your deepest longings in the Light to see if they are pure. In this silence comes a deep peace beyond words and thoughts, as natural as breathing. The native American chief Papunehang, who had attended a meeting with Woolman, said, “I love to feel where words come from.”

—George Peck, 1988

¹⁰ Genesis 32:24-28

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

89

Lord, baptize us again and again with the pure water of life, the life of Thy love for us. Touch our hearts with brands from Thine altar, to destroy those things in our lives that keep us from being authentic examples of the work of Thy transforming power. Open our eyes, that we may see the work which Thou wouldest have us do for Thee. With grateful hearts we come with assurance unto Thee.
—Charles Warner Palmer, c.1940

90

Oh God, our Father, spirit of the universe, I am old in years and in the sight of others, but I do not feel old within myself. I have hopes and purposes, things I wish to do before I die. A surging of life within me cries, “Not yet! Not yet!” more strongly than it did ten years ago, perhaps because the nearer approach of death arouses the defensive strength of the instinct to cling to life.

Help me to loosen, fiber by fiber, the instinctive strings that bind me to the life I know. Infuse me with Thy spirit so that it is Thee I turn to, not the old ropes of habit and thought. Make me poised and free, ready when the intimation comes to go forward eagerly and joyfully, into the new phase of life that we call death.

Help me to bring my work each day to an orderly state so that it will not be a burden to those who must fold it up and put it away when I am gone. Keep me ever aware and ever prepared for the summons.

If pain comes before the end help me not to fear it or struggle against it but to welcome it as a hastening of the process by which the strings that bind me to life are untied. Give me joy in awaiting the great change that comes after this life of many changes, let my self be merged in Thy Self as a candle’s wavering light is caught up into the sun.

—Elizabeth Gray Vining, 1978

91

So much of life is just going on and going on, long after the excitement and stimulus has faded...there is so much to ask for that I get very lost. And then I just come back to the simple longings, the simplest prayers of all; that Christ may be in those we love, that our love may be more Christ-like, more unmoveable, that we may be kept sinless by some immense miracle, and by God’s side whatever happens. We must give up trying to hold His hand, and just stretch

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

out our hands—even if they are just fists—for God to hold. There is all the difference...between holding and being held.

—George Lloyd Hodgkin, 1912

92

A friend tells me that when she prays for someone she does not so much pray to God for them as for God for them. This seems to me a vital clue about prayer. It is God that the troubled person needs, not our advice and instructions. As we learn more about worship we learn to listen more deeply so that we can be channels through which God's love reaches the other person. It is God at work, not we ourselves; we are simply used.

—Diana Lampen, 1979

93

Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests against blusterings and storms. That is it which moulds up into patience, into innocency, into soberness, into stillness, into stayedness, into quietness, up to God, with his power.

—George Fox, 1658

...

The Scriptures, Jesus, Inward Teacher

138

A great deal of charity is needed about messages that come in the meeting. No message is likely to be meant for every one of the worshipers. What may not affect me may open out life for another, and this consciousness must always be there.

—Douglas Steere, 1972

139

Perhaps one in worship senses ... that he is only going round and round in his mind about a problem, to no good point. He will and must take these things up again later, perhaps with new energy and insight. For the moment, however, it seems right simply to be in the quiet. The worshiper does not try to do anything, but simply to be in that which is eternal.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

—Sandra Cronk, 1991

140

If worship does not change us, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. Resentments cannot be held with the same tenacity when we enter His gracious light. As Jesus said, we will need to leave our gift at the altar and go set the matter straight (Matthew 5:23¹¹). In worship an increased power steals its way into the heart sanctuary, an increased compassion grows in the soul. To worship is to change.

—Richard Foster, 1978

141

To love and be loved is a universal human urge. Is it any wonder, then, that we are moved to seek God's love?... It is to this divine love that we are called. This is the high promise of man's life. We are called away from indifference, from meanness, malice, prejudice, and hate. We are called above the earthly loves that come and go and are unsure. We are called into the deep enduring love of God and man and all creation. Worship is a door into that love. Once we have entered it, our every act is a prayer, our whole life a continuous worship.

—N. Jean Toomer, 1947

142

Feeling the spring of Divine love opened, and a concern to speak, I said a few words in a meeting, in which I found peace. Being thus humbled and disciplined under the cross, my understanding became more strengthened to distinguish the pure spirit which inwardly moves upon the heart, and which taught me to wait in silence sometimes many weeks together, until I felt that rise which prepares the creature to stand like a trumpet, through which the Lord speaks to his flock.... All the faithful are not called to the public ministry; but whoever are, are called to minister of that which they have tasted and handled spiritually. The outward modes of worship are various; but whenever any are true ministers of Jesus Christ, it is from the operation of his Spirit upon their hearts.

¹¹ **Matthew 5:23-24** (NRSV) So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

—John Woolman, 1741

143

One characteristic institution among Friends of the “quietist” period was the traveling ministry.... The call to this ministry came often in a childhood sense of the presence of God when alone and out-of-doors. It was reinforced by powerful examples of local and traveling ministers and tested by the trials of learning to respond to the Spirit’s moving to speak in meeting. After sufficient testing, the minister would become more sensitive to the spiritual condition of others. He or she would not only speak at various meetings, often at wearisome distances from home, but would hold “religious opportunities” with families or individuals, giving them spiritual counsel. Though much of this ministry was among Friends and designed to maintain the spiritual health of the Society, it was not uncommon to call special meetings for Blacks, Indians, or apprentices, as well as to visit jails or mines. The Quaker leaven in the world owes much to these “active contemplatives” of the past, whose central message was that the living presence of the Spirit is here and now.

—Carol Murphy, 1983

144

It is our earnest desire that ministers and elders may be as nursing fathers and mothers to those that are young in the ministry, and with all care and diligence advise, admonish, and if they see occasion, reprove them in a tender and Christian spirit, according to the rules of our Discipline and counsel of Friends in that respect; also exhort them frequently to read the Holy Scriptures, and reverently seek the mind of the Spirit of Truth to open the mysteries thereof, that, abiding in simple and patient submission to the will of God, and keeping down to the openings of Divine love in themselves, they may witness a gradual growth in their gifts, and be preserved from extending their declarations further than they find the life and power of Truth to bear them up.

—Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1723

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

145

When men and women come to this pass that they have nothing to rely on but the Lord, then they will meet together to wait upon the Lord: and this was the first ground and motive of our setting up meetings; and I would to God that that was the use that everyone would make of them, then they would be justly and properly used according to the institution of them at first; we should use them as poor desolate helpless people that are broken off from all their own confidence and trust and have nothing to rely on but the mercy and goodness of God.

—Stephen Crisp, 1663

146

[Some] need to share their pain and have found no other way of being heard than during the silent Meeting. They come for the healing of their hurts, but they come with only an incomplete acceptance that the mystery of God's presence is at the heart of Meeting for Worship. Because their audience does not include God they don't listen for an answer, they don't allow the power of the Holy Spirit in a gathered Meeting to overshadow them as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. If you don't believe God is present, what answer are you expecting and from whom?

—Brenda Clifft Heales and Chris Cook, 1992

147

There can be complete unity of worship without a single word being said. I have known a few such meetings and shall never forget them. It was their silence, not their words, that was memorable. And even one short sentence, spoken nervously at the spirit's prompting, is better than a well-phrased five-minute talk prepared beforehand.

—Clive Sansom, 1962

148

And thou, faithful babe, though thou stutter and stammer forth a few words in the dread of the Lord, they are accepted.

—William Dewsbury, 1660

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

149

It has been my experience that if I come to meeting in a state of strong emotion and follow an easy impulse to talk about it, I—and the meeting?—are left with a sense of emptiness. But if I trust that there's a reason why I'm here, now, in this state, but that it's God's reason, not mine, and my part is to wait in holy expectancy—strange things happen. Messages which speak to my condition are given by people who couldn't possibly know of it. The meeting ministers to my need and uses my state to minister to others—quite without my willing it.

I believe that there's an explanation for this phenomenon. Strong emotion can make us what the early Friends called tender: vulnerable to the workings of the Spirit. I suspect that the presence of one such person in our midst can cause the meeting to gather.

—Esther Murer, 1988

150

On First-days I frequented meetings and the greater part of my time I slept, but took no account of preaching nor received any other benefit, than being there kept me out of bad company which indeed is a very great service to youth...but one First-day, being at meeting, a young woman named Anne Wilson was there and preached; she was very zealous and fixing my eye upon her, she with a great zeal pointed her finger at me uttering these words with much power: "A traditional Quaker, thou comest to meeting as thou went from it, and goes from it as thou came to it but art no better for thy coming; what wilt thou do in the end?" This was so pat to my then condition that like Saul I was smitten to the ground as it might be said, but turning my thoughts inwards, in secret I cried, "Lord, what shall I do to help it?" And a voice as it were spoke in my heart, saying "Look unto me, and I will help thee."

—Samuel Bownas, 1696

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

<http://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/queries/1-meeting-for-worship/>

1. Meeting for Worship

- Are our meetings for worship held in stilled, expectant waiting upon God?
- As we worship is there a living silence in which we are drawn together by the power of God in our midst?
- Is the spirit of our worship together one that nurtures all worshipers?
- How does our Meeting respond when the vocal ministry seems inappropriate, or when the meeting for worship is consistently not gathered?
- *Do I faithfully attend meeting with heart and mind prepared for worship, clear of any predetermination to speak or not to speak, and expecting that worship will be a source of strength and guidance?*
- *Does worship deepen my relationship with God, increase my faithfulness, and refresh and renew my daily life, both inwardly and in my relationship with others?*
- *Have I experienced in worship that direct leading to listen or to speak, and have I been faithful to my own experience?*

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-2/chapter-2/meeting-worship>

The Meeting for Worship

The meeting for worship is the heart of every Friends' Meeting. It is based on faith that men and women can enter into direct communion with God.

In the excitement of their discovery that Christ was alive and had "come to teach His people Himself," early Friends gathered for worship fully expecting the Spirit to be present, and out of their hushed expectancy they entered into a fellowship with God that changed their lives. In the course of such worship came new revelations of Truth and a force that drove Friends out into the world to spread the news and to serve humanity.

Friends in New England try in their meetings for worship to capture the same spirit, a sense of God's presence in the midst, and to be open to new revelation. Some New England Friends gather in silent waiting upon God without designated leadership or program. Some are led in worship by a pastor whose function is to encourage and cultivate the ministry of each individual. In either case, for the meeting to be successful, all must share and respond.

Preparation for worship is essential. Preparation is a continual process of prayer, of reading the Bible and other religious literature, of learning from human experiences, and of daily practicing the presence of God. Some come on Sunday morning expecting to receive God's revelation with no previous effort on their part. For the cup to overflow on Sunday, however, it must be filled up all through the week. Early Friends came to worship with their cup overflowing, and it was then that the power was given to go out and to share the Truth that had come to them.

In the unprogrammed meeting, as the worship proceeds, out of communion with God a message may come to one of the worshipping individuals. Sometimes the message is purely personal; at other times it seems to belong to the meeting. The worshipper is then under divine compulsion to share it with fellow seekers, to contribute to the vocal service of the meeting, however haltingly.

In the meetings with pastoral leadership, the pastor may prepare a message and an order of service during the week, but the pastor is only a worshipper among worshippers, and the life of the pastoral worship depends on the response of the group. Ideally the prepared message arises not just from the pastor's own spiritual

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

resources, but from the worship of the group.

Not all meetings, whether pastoral or based on silence, achieve a high level. Yet God does break through the crust of apathy, of worldly preoccupations or lack of preparation. We are humble learners in the school of Christ, and our weaknesses and failures should not deter us. When a meeting for worship gathers in active expectancy of God's presence with complete openness of heart and mind, the power to change lives will arise.

In That Which is Eternal

Friends, meet together and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was.

—George Fox: “Epistle 149” (1657), in Works, vol. 7, 1831, p. 141.

The First That Enters

The first that enters into the place of your meeting turn in thy mind to the light, and wait upon God singly, as if none were present but the Lord; and here thou art strong. Then the next that comes in, let them in simplicity of heart sit down and turn in to the same light, and wait in the spirit; and so all the rest coming in, in the fear of the Lord, sit down in pure stillness and silence of all flesh, and wait in the light. Those who are brought to a pure still waiting upon God in the spirit, are come nearer to the Lord than words are; for God is a spirit, and in the spirit is he worshipped. In such a meeting there will be an unwillingness to part asunder, being ready to say in yourselves, it is good to be here: and this is the end of all words and writings to bring people to the eternal living Word.

—Letter of Alexander Parker to Friends, dated 14.xi.1659 (i.e., Jan. 1660). Abram Rawlinson Barclay, ed.: *Letters, etc., of early Friends*, 1841, pp. 365-6.

The Meeting

And so I find it well to come
For deeper rest to this still room,
For here the habit of the soul
Feels less the outer world's control;
The strength of mutual purpose pleads
More earnestly our common needs;
And from the silence multiplied
By these still forms on either side,
The world that time and sense have known

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

Falls off and leaves us God alone.
—John Greenleaf Whittier, “The meeting.”

Waiting Upon the Lord

When you come to your meetings what do you do? Do you then gather together bodily only, and kindle a fire, compassing yourselves about with the sparks of your own kindling, and so please yourselves, and walk in the “Light of your own fire and the sparks which you have kindled?” Or rather, do you sit down in True Silence, resting from your own Will and Workings, and waiting upon the Lord, fixed with your minds in that Light wherewith Christ has enlightened you, until the Lord breathes life in you, refresheth you, and prepares you that you may offer unto him a pure and spiritual sacrifice?

—William Penn: *Works*, ed. Joseph Besse, 1726, vol. 1, p. 219. “A tender visitation,” published 1677. Spelling and punctuation modernized.

Inward Condition of the Soul

As there is no true prostration of heart before Him without submission, no one can worship, in the true sense of the word, whose intentions and plans are consciously out of line with the Lord’s will. If God is everywhere, and equally near to us at all times, and if the essence of spiritual worship consists in our inward attitude before Him, then nothing however it may stimulate worship in its outward form is worship apart from this inward condition of soul. There is no form or ceremony that can by itself be an act of worship; neither can there be such a thing as worship by proxy.

—Richard H. Thomas: *The objects of public worship*, Yorkshire 1905 committee leaflet.

Ideal of Pastoral Worship

The Quaker method is extremely simple. No intermediary, ritual, or ceremony is required. Words are not essential. God does not need to be brought near for “Closer is He than breathing and nearer than hands and feet.” It is the human mind and heart that need to be adjusted and made conscious of His presence. And as the sincere worshipper waits in silent meditation, or voices prayer or praise, he experiences this fresh sense of God, and with it a renewal of spiritual strength in communion with God and with his fellow worshippers.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

In such a setting the whole meeting becomes a listening post for divine intimations and revelations. Vocal prayer gathers up the aspirations and needs of all the group. Hymns and spiritual songs, sung with the spirit and with the understanding, are not only appropriate but become the normal and helpful expression of faith, hope, and love toward God and in praise of Christ, the Savior of mankind. And the minister speaks with freedom and power; his message, whether conceived in previous meditation and prayer or given by the immediate operation of the Spirit on his mind, will be fresh, illuminating, and uplifting. He will be able to draw on the resources of past experience and study as well as to interpret helpfully the present manifestations of God's will and word.

—North Carolina Y. M.: *Faith and practice*, 1962, p. 27

We Can Find God

We can find God when we are out on the hills or alone in the quiet of our own rooms or listening to great music. But we need to find Him too in the world of men, and for some of us this may be more difficult. The vision we have seen is to be brought back into daily life among people who are difficult to get on with as well as those who are easy. Because we are not separate and apart, we need to worship together as well as alone. We are all part of the great family of God and we cannot fully be ourselves without the help of other people. Jesus spoke of himself as the vine and of us as the branches and God as the vinegrower. Each branch is small and may look insignificant, but each is part of the vine, and is essential to the whole and has its meaning as part of the whole. The larger life surrounds and explains and glorifies all our small individual parts. We are essential to God and He and our fellow men are essential to us. We need the help of other souls who are striving upward, too, and who help us forward by the unseen threads that bind us together. One helps another with or without words and sometimes in our Meeting for Worship we shall know the experience of a thought that has come to us, being voiced by someone else and carried further than we could carry it. This seems strange and wonderful, but it is part of the great unseen life in which we are all linked together.

—Ruth M. Fawell: *Worship and our Quaker meeting*, 1957, p. 3.

Deeper Than Words

A Friends' meeting, however silent, is at the very lowest a

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

witness that worship is something other and deeper than words, and that it is to the unseen and eternal things that we desire to give the first place in our lives. And when the meeting, whether silent or not, is awake, and looking upwards, there is much more in it than this. In the united stillness of the truly “gathered” meeting there is a power known only by experience, and mysterious even when most familiar. There are perhaps few things which more readily flow “from vessel to vessel” than quietness. The presence of fellow-worshippers in some gently penetrating manner reveals to the spirit something of the nearness of the Divine Presence. “Where two or three are gathered together in His name”¹² have we not again and again felt that the promise was fulfilled and that the Master Himself was indeed “in the midst of us?” And it is out of the depths of this stillness that there do arise at times spoken words which, springing from the very source of prayer, have something of the power of prayer something of its quickening and melting and purifying effect. Such words as these have at least as much power as silence to gather into stillness.

—Caroline E. Stephen: *Light arising*, 1908, pp. 68-9.

God Was There

The following is the testimony of an American Protestant minister attending Friends' meeting in Cambridge, England.

We had the great privilege of sharing in silent worship there for two years, in what is one of the most dynamic of Christian fellowships. There was no question in our minds as we left that house of prayer and meditation each week that something real had happened, that we had found God directly, immediately, experientially, corporately. We could feel the presence of spirit as definitely as we could feel the temperature. To be sure, it fluctuated. The meetings were not on the same level.

There would be “highs” and “lows.” That variation, however, did not deny it rather confirmed our consciousness that here was a reality more than just the sum total of our individual and pooled insights, however limited it might be by those. God was there, where two or three were gathered together. We anticipated each coming Sunday with the same eagerness, and the same expectation of reality, with which a father in a distant city anticipates his week-end at

¹² Matthew 18:20 (NRSV) “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

home with his family.

—Robert H. Beaven: *In Him is life*, 1946, pp. 175-6.

Prayer is a Great Power

Prayer offered in the right spirit is a great power and has a wonderfully unifying and quickening effect. The times of silent waiting in our meetings for worship are not intended only for the refreshment of the individual worshipper. If the silence be a living one, in which the worshippers seek to enter into each other's needs and to bear in their hearts the sufferings of the world without and the call to dedication in the service of the kingdom of God, silent prayer may naturally lead also to vocal prayer. The expression of prayer will not be of the nature of an address to the congregation, neither exhortation nor exposition of doctrine. If it is offered simply and humbly in fellowship with others and as a heart-felt cry of man's spirit to his Heavenly Helper, it is of the utmost value in building up our common religious life. If we meet as members of one family in the presence of our Father, we should not shrink unduly from this offering of love.

—London Y. M.: *Christian faith and practice*, 1960, no. 300.

Worship That is Creative

When it comes to the apparatus of worship that can renew men and women in attentive awareness to the living Listener, the classical Quaker practice of corporate silent waiting on God seems stark indeed to those who are used to the elaborate forms of a liturgical or even a free church service.

In laying them aside as Quakers do in their silent waiting worship, there is a responsibility whose magnitude it is scarcely possible to exaggerate that is placed squarely upon the Quaker worshipper himself. Here indeed is a service of worship that demands that every believer be his own priest. For in the Quaker meeting for worship, the member must still his body, still his mind, must attend to the presence of God, must thank and adore him for being what he is, must feel the incongruities in his own life that are out of keeping with such a presence, must long for their removal and for forgiveness, must be inwardly absolved, must become conscious of persons and situations in special need and draw them into this presence, must wait in utter stillness before God, and if some even deeper insight into his own condition should be discovered to him by any vocal ministry that may occur in the meeting or by the unhurried

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

stay in the presence of the Divine Listener, he must be ready to yield to what is required of him.

In the Quaker waiting silence, there is a freedom and an absence of externally guided order which is both baffling and deceptive to one on first acquaintance with it. Only slowly do the inner forms of discipline of this form of worship make themselves known. One thing, however, is clear. This type of free worship can only be creative in a company of people who are intimately aware of and intimately gathered round the living Listener who knows all yet cares, who shares, and whose expectation never wavers in its constancy. The dilemma which anyone seeking to explain Quaker worship faces is that only when this inner ordering has dropped into the background as we are swept up into the presence of the Listener himself can the real significance of the preparation become apparent.
—Douglas V. Steere: *On listening to another* (Swarthmore lecture), 1955, pp. 31, 33-6.

Not Alone in the Spoken Word

The gathered group depends utterly upon the Spirit of God for direction and leadership, and meets in the faith that that Spirit is available and can be known to all. He may be known in that “sound of gentle stillness” in which the ancient Hebrew prophet found him; in private and personal pressures and restraints which are significant for the individual worshipper and known to him alone; in vocal ministry which is initiated by the Spirit of God in the midst; in the spoken prayer, sometimes haltingly uttered and perhaps offered in deep misgiving, yet in the belief that he to whom the prayer is addressed has prompted it. In all the rhythm of our worship we seek to be guided by and sensitive to the movement of God’s Spirit in our own hearts within the gathered community. It would, however, be a great mistake were it to be assumed that only in the spoken word is God’s message given to the worshipper. In the silence the faithful listener may catch the accents of a Voice within and become vividly aware of a demand which has absolute authority, a demand to which he must be obedient or betray something deep within him which has, for him, become the voice of God himself.

—Edgar G. Dunstan: *Quakers and the religious quest* (Swarthmore lecture), 1956, pp. 32-3.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

Greatly Edified and Refreshed

Yea, though there be not a word spoken, yet is the true spiritual worship performed, and the body of Christ edified; yea, it may, and hath often fallen out among us, that divers meetings have passed without one word; and yet our souls have been greatly edified and refreshed, and our hearts wonderfully overcome with the secret sense of God's power and Spirit, which without words hath been ministered from one vessel to another.

—Robert Barclay: *Apology*, prop. 11, sect. 6, 1908 Phila. ed., p. 336.

Group Worship Differs from Private Devotion

Those who persevere in group worship know that it differs from private devotion as the music of an orchestra differs from the music of a single player.

—Beatrice Saxon Snell, *A joint and visible fellowship*, (Pendle Hill pamphlet no. 140), 1965, p. 10.

The Basis of Holy Obedience

Worship, according to the ancient practice of the Religious Society of Friends, is entirely without any human direction or supervision. A group of devout persons come together and sit down quietly with no prearrangement, each seeking to have an immediate sense of divine leading and to know at first hand the presence of the Living Christ. It is not wholly accurate to say that such a Meeting is held on the basis of Silence; it is more accurate to say that it is held on the basis of "Holy Obedience." Those who enter such a Meeting can harm it in two specific ways: first, by an advanced determination to speak; and second, by advanced determination to keep silent. The only way in which a worshipper can help such a Meeting is by an advanced determination to try to be responsive in listening to the still small voice¹³ and doing whatever may be commanded.

—Statement prepared for a Friends' meeting attended by delegates to the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, Holland, in 1948.

As Many Candles Lighted

As many candles lighted and put in one place do greatly augment the light and make it more to shine forth, so when many are gathered together into the same life there is more of the glory of God,

¹³ **1Kings 19:12** (KJV) And after the earthquake a fire; *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

and His power appears to the refreshment of each individual, for that he partakes not only of the light and life raised in himself but in all the rest.

—Robert Barclay: *Apology*, prop. 11, sect. 17, 1908 Phila. ed., pp. 364-5.

The Body of Christ

Quakerism revived a doctrine, central in the experience of the early Christian church. This was the belief that the Spirit would be poured out upon the congregation ready to receive it. This Spirit, or “that of God in every man,” or Christ within, or the Seed of the Kingdom, or the Truth, or the Inward Light, or the Witness of God in all Consciences, to use some of the many names which the Quakers applied to the Divine Presence in the midst of the worshipping group, unites all the members into a single organic whole, the body of Christ. The individual experience of inward oneness with an invisible Reality is also an experience of the mystical union of individuals with one another.

—Howard H. Brinton: *The society of Friends* (Pendle Hill pamphlet, no. 48), 1949, pp. 3, 4.

What Friends Receive in Silence

Long experience shows that out of a living silence there may come precious openings of truth, and that words may be spoken to the condition of those present. When the spoken ministry is exercised under the leading of the divine Spirit, and not under the stress of a fixed engagement, it is felt that it is truly a response to a community need, and the spiritual level of the meeting is lifted to a higher plane. Comforted, supported, inspired, as the case may be, the worshipper does not take leave of God for a week; but inwardly assured of his loving presence, he goes out with a tendered conscience to meet the tasks ahead, strengthened in his purpose to live under divine guidance to the glory of his Master’s name.

—William Wistar Comfort: *Just among Friends the Quaker way of life*, 1945, p. 28.

No Set Form of Worship

We find that Jesus Christ prescribes no set form of worship to his children. In the whole New Testament there is no order nor command given in this thing, but to follow the revelation of the Spirit, save only that general one of meeting together; a thing dearly

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

owned and diligently practiced by us. True it is, mention is made of the duties of praying, preaching and singing; but what order or method should be kept in so doing there is not one word to be found; yea, these duties are always annexed to the assistance, leadings, and motions of God's spirit.

—Robert Barclay: *Apology*, prop. 11, sect. 10, 1908 Phila. ed., pp. 347-8.

Aware of a Deeper Life

Fox's whole method of worship was an outgrowth of his belief in and his experience of this close intimate inward relation between God and man. He thought of worship as mutual and reciprocal communion between the Human soul and God. The problem is never one of going somewhere to find a distant and hidden God. The problem rather is one of human preparation for meeting and communing with a God who is always near at hand but cannot be found and enjoyed until the soul is ready for such an exalted experience. It means, therefore, that the worshipper, if he is to enter into this great attainment, must cease his occupations with external affairs, his thoughts of house and farm and business, and centre down into those deeper levels of his being where he can feel the circulation of spiritual currents and have healing and refreshment and restoration and fortification flow in from beyond himself. This is not worship, but it is preparation for it, and there comes, with this awareness of the deeper Life, a palpitating sense of joy and wonder, and a surge of appreciation and adoration which form the heart of worship. It was in moments like that in the early Quaker meetings there came tremulous waves of emotion, which set the entire group into a state of quaking, from which the name of the movement was born.

—Rufus M. Jones: *George Fox, seeker and Friend*, 1930, pp. 73-4.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-3/advice>

The Advices

The Advices have served Friends for many generations in their search for a life centered in the Spirit. Arising from the experience and aspirations of successive generations of Friends, the Advices are illustrations of how they seek to carry their faith into all aspects of life.

Advices first appeared in the form of epistles sent among Friends to encourage and strengthen each other in their faith. The earliest surviving collection of Advices was issued from Balby in England in 1656. Its concluding statement begins, “Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by.”

Friends find their essential unity in their profound and exhilarating belief in the pervasive presence of God and in the continuing responsibility of each person and worshipping group to seek the leading of the Spirit in all things. Obedience to the leading of that Spirit rather than to any written statement of belief or conduct is the obligation of their faith.

Yet the Advices should have a quickening influence in shaping our daily lives. Their reading is intended to remind us that all aspects of our lives are under divine guidance and to heighten our awareness that in all our relationships we act in the sight of God.

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Meeting for Worship

Consider with care how God reaches us in meeting for worship. To every Friend is given a share of responsibility for the meeting. Friends are advised, therefore, to be diligent in attendance at meetings and in inward preparation for them. Let us be concerned to enter reverently into communion with God and with one another, to yield ourselves to the influence of the divine presence. Then what is evil in us may be weakened and the good raised up. God calls each one to the service of the meeting; let us be obedient and faithful, whether by word, by song, or by silent waiting, and let us receive the messages of others in a tender spirit.

Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 3

<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-3/queries>

The Queries

Friends have developed the Queries to assist us to consider prayerfully the true source of spiritual strength and the extent to which the conduct of our lives gives witness to our Christian faith. To these ends, the Queries should be read frequently in private devotions and regularly in monthly and quarterly meetings.

In using these Queries, meetings should be aware that our standards of conduct do not derive from an outward set of rules but rather from the life and teachings of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament, from the examples offered by the spiritual experiences and lives of those who have preceded us, and from our own encounters with that inward revelation through which “the way, the truth, and the life”¹⁴ seek expression today.

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Meeting for Worship

- Are meetings for worship held in expectant waiting for divine guidance?
- Are you faithful and punctual in attendance?
- Do you come in a spirit of openness with heart and mind prepared for communion with God?
- Do both silent and vocal ministry arise in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit?
- Do all other activities of your meeting find their inspiration in worship, and do they, in turn, help to uphold the worshipping group?

¹⁴ **John 14:6** (NRSV) Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”