

## *Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6*

### **The Meeting Community**

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

#### *Experience*

#### **Introduction**

Margaret Fell records that in the year 1652 George Fox arrived at Swarthmoor Hall for the first time. The hall was a place of hospitality for visiting preachers. He spent the night and on the following day went to Ulverston steeplehouse where, when the congregation had assembled, he asked if he might speak. He was told he might, and Margaret Fell remembered his words for the rest of her life.

Fox spoke of the inwardness of true religion and of how the prophets, Christ, and the apostles “enjoyed and possessed” that which the Lord had given them. And then he continued: “You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of Light and has walked in the Light, and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?”

As a religious society we value the process by which we find the words to describe the inward experience of being a child of Light and of the myriad ways in which we learn to trust that Light.

The selections that follow tell of what we can say; they also declare that which we have come to enjoy and possess. Some passages that more directly address issues of living and dying have been gathered under that heading.

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[F]or some time I took no notice of any religion, but minded recreation, as it is called; and went after it into many excesses and vanities—as foolish mirth, carding, dancing, and singing. I frequented music assemblies, and made vain visits where there were jovial feastings. But in the midst of all this my heart was often sad and pained beyond expression. I was not hurried into those follies by being captivated by them, but from not having found in religion what I had sought and longed after. I would often say within myself,

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what are they all to me? I could easily leave all this; for it hath not my heart, it is not my delight, it hath not power over me. I had rather serve the Lord, if I could indeed feel and know that which would be acceptable to Him.

O Lord, suffer me no more to fall in with any false way, but show me the Truth.

—Mary Proude Springett Penington, c. 1650

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In the condition I have mentioned, of weary seeking and not finding, I married my dear husband Isaac Penington. My love was drawn to him because I found he saw the deceit of all mere notions about religion; he lay as one that refused to be comforted until he came to His temple, who is truth and no lie. All things that had only the appearance of religion were very manifest to him, so that he was sick and weary of show, and in this my heart united with him, and a desire was in me to be serviceable to him. I gave up much to be a companion to him.

I resolved never to go back into those formal things I had left, having found death and darkness in them; but would rather be without a religion, until the Lord manifestly taught me one....

Whilst I was in this state, I heard of a new people called Quakers, but I resolved not to inquire after them, nor their principles. I heard nothing of their ways except that they used thee and thou to every one; and I saw a book written about plain language by George Fox.

—Mary Proude Springett Penington, c. 1655

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[I]n consequence of my decided resolution to attend the meetings of Friends, my dear father (no doubt in faithfulness to his own religious views, and from the desire to rescue a poor child from apprehended error) requested me not to return to the paternal roof, unless I could be satisfied to conform to the religious education which he had conscientiously given me. This, with a tender, heart-piercing remonstrance from my dear, dear mother, was far more deeply felt than I can describe; and marvelous in my view, even to this day, was the settled, firm belief that I must follow on, to know the soul's salvation for myself; truly in a way that I knew not!

—Mary Capper, c.1830

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Today I have felt all my old irreligious feelings. My object shall be to search, try to do right, and if I am mistaken, it is not my fault; but the state I am now in makes it difficult to act. What little religion I have felt has been owing to my giving way quietly and humbly to my feelings; but the more I reason upon it, the more I get into a labyrinth of uncertainty, and my mind is so much inclined to both scepticism and enthusiasm, that if I argue and doubt, I shall be a total sceptic; if, on the contrary, I give way to my feeling, and as it were, wait for religion, I may be led away.

But I hope that will not be the case; at all events, religion, true and uncorrupted, is all that comforts the greatest; it is the first stimulus to virtue; it is a support under every affliction. I am sure it is better to be so in an enthusiastic degree than not to be so at all, for it is a delightful enthusiasm.

—Elizabeth Gurney Fry, 1798

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The first gleam of light, “the first cold light of morning” which gave promise of day with its noontide glories, dawned on me one day at meeting, when I had been meditating on my state in great depression. I seemed to hear the words articulated in my spirit, “Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee.” Then I believed that God speaks...by His spirit. I strove to lead a more Christian life, in unison with what I knew to be right, and looked for brighter days, not forgetting the blessings that are granted to prayer.

—Caroline Fox, 1841

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I have been tried with the applause of the world, and none know how great a trial that has been, and the deep humiliations of it; and yet I fully believe it is not nearly so dangerous as being made much of in religious society. There is a snare even in religious unity, if we are not on the watch. I have sometimes felt that it was not so dangerous to be made much of in the world, as by those whom we think highly of in our own Society: the more I have been made much of by the world, the more I have been inwardly humbled. I could often adopt the words of Sir Francis Bacon— “When I have ascended before men, I have descended in humiliation before God.”

—Elizabeth Gurney Fry, 1844

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Hope, peace, and encouragement is not enough to depict my religion. When my spirit is animated by my religion and is aware of the inviolable Truth prevailing, my heart dances for joy and gratitude and sings the praise of God! Every moment is a mystery. Even this body of mine, what a mystery it is, whose heart is beating incessantly without my knowing, and whose lungs breathe ceaselessly without my knowing! This air is God's, the light is God's, we are his. I am living with all the universe, and all the universe is living with me, in God.

—Yukio Irie, 1957

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Some time ago I was in Germany, visiting isolated Friends throughout that country. One man I met was a factory worker. He spoke ungrammatical German. His teeth were discoloured, his shoulders were stooped. He spoke the Swabian dialect. But he was a radiant soul, a quiet, reticent saint of God. He knew the inner secrets of the life that is clothed in God. We were drawn together by invisible currents. We knew each other immediately, more deeply than if we had been neighbours for twenty years. I called at his simple home near Stuttgart. He motioned me to escape from the rest of the visitors and come into the bedroom. There, leaning on the window sills, we talked together. Immediately we gravitated to the wonders of prayer and of God's dealing with the soul. I told him of some new insights that had recently come to me. He listened and nodded confirmation, for he already knew those secrets. He understood and could tell me of things of the Spirit of which I had only begun to guess. I feel sure that I knew more history and mathematics and literature and philosophy than did he. And the social gulf in Germany between a professor and a factory man is infinitely wide. But that afternoon I was taught by him, and nourished by him, and we looked at each other eye to eye and knew a common love of Christ. Then as the afternoon shadows fell and dissolved with twilight, our words became less frequent, until they ceased altogether. And we mingled our lives in the silence, for we needed no words to convey our thoughts. I have only had one letter from him in the year, but we are as near to each other now, every day, as we were that afternoon.

—Thomas Kelly, 1942

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I have sometimes been asked what were my reasons for deciding on that refusal to register for war duties that sent me to Holloway Jail twenty-two years ago. I can only answer that my reason told me that I was a fool, that I was risking my job and my career, that an isolated example could do no good, that it was a futile gesture since even if I did register my three small children would exempt me. But reason was fighting a losing battle. I had wrestled in prayer and I knew beyond all doubt that I must refuse to register, that those who believed that war was the wrong way to fight evil must stand out against it however much they stood alone, and that I and mine must take the consequences. The “and mine” made it more difficult, but I question whether children ever really suffer loss in the long run through having parents who are willing to stand by principles; many a soldier had to leave his family and thought it his duty to do so. When you have to make a vital decision about behaviour, you cannot sit on the fence. To decide to do nothing is still a decision, and it means that you remain on the station platform or the airstrip when the train or plane has left.

—Kathleen Lonsdale, 1964

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The field of my religious training presupposed a clear definite call to a particular kind of service. I must confess that this has never happened to me.... I have never aspired to a particular job or asked for one; nor have I been “stricken on the road to Damascus” as was Paul and had my way clearly dictated to me from the heavens. The entire course has been a maturing of family and personal decisions. In perspective I should say in all humility that my life has been characterized by an inadequate, persistent effort to try to find a workable harmony between religious profession and daily practice.

—Clarence E. Pickett, 1966

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By day I sat in the Gandhi library reading the writings that had poured from Gandhi’s pen in his life. As I read his passionate words about sarvodaya (welfare) I knew that these [people] were my brothers and sisters too, and that I also could not want what they could not have. I wrote long letters home about stripping ourselves of what we did not need....

I saw how we all had chained ourselves to daily rhythms that

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were bound to defeat us. Day after day we recapitulated the old cycle of effort, irritation, impatience and anger—softened by small epiphanies of love and remorse. The spirit had to break through from time to time, because spirit is our very nature, but...how heavy-handed our daily behavior. For how many millennia had this gone on? Was the human race never to discover its self-forged chains?

The snapping of my chains was my signal that the human race was indeed to be freed—in theological language—from the bondage of sin and death. My experience is one of the simplest and oldest religious experiences that come to humans.... Was the leap an act of the will or an invasion of grace?

—Elise Boulding, 1975

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For me the certain realisation of God came at the time of the breakdown of my marriage. The unthinkable had happened and I seemed to be at my lowest state physically and mentally. There seemed to be no present and no future but only a nightmare of dark uncertainty. One distinct message reached me: to “go under” was out of the question, I could only start again, learn from my mistakes and take this second chance at life that I had been given. I found a strength within I did not know I had and I believe now that it came from the prayers and loving support of so many people round me.

This rebirth was for me a peak experience, the memory of which is a constant reassurance in times of emptiness and doubt. Facing the future, even with a sure faith, is not easy. I am cautious at every step forward, taking time and believing I shall be told where to go and what to do. Waiting patiently and creatively is at times unbearably difficult, but I know it must be so.

—Jennifer Morris, 1980

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About a dozen years ago I became critically ill and I have a vivid memory of looking down on my self on the bed; doctors and nurses worked on that body, and I felt held in such secureness, joy, and contentment, a sense of the utter rightness of things.... The crisis passed and I was filled with wonder at the newness of life....

Soon after, I had radical surgery followed by many months of slow recovery with repeated setbacks and further operations. There were times when truly out of the depths I cried; I had no reserves of strength left, either physical, emotional, or spiritual, but I never

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completely lost the memory of being held and the wonder at being alive. Gradually the wounds healed: old griefs as well as disease and operations.

—Jenifer Faulkner, 1982

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When I was a child, the man who lived next door and who was our landlord, tried to rape me. He then frightened me into silence, threatening to make us homeless again if I were to tell. My mother used to say, “I can’t think why you have changed so much.” Well of course I knew, but I couldn’t tell, so I withdrew into a shell. People used to say how serious I had become. Where was all my former sparkle?

Thirty years later, his wife visited my father after my mother’s death. I happened to be there at the time. She told me that her husband whom we had called Uncle Sid, was dying. I knew at once from the sudden lurch of my stomach what I had to do. I had to go and see him. I was terrified.

The next day I drove to the hospital. I parked outside, and then I became paralysed with fear. I simply could not get out of the car. “God,” I prayed urgently, “you’ll have to take over. I can’t do this myself.” I was able to get out of the car and go and find Uncle Sid. He was very shocked to see me and looked frightened. But God had taken over, and I was given just the right gentle words to say, and Uncle Sid said to me, “I can’t thank you enough for coming. Now I can die at peace.”

—Diana Lampen, 1991

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God’s love is ministered to most people through the love of our fellow human beings. Sometimes that love is expressed physically or sexually. For me and my lover, John, God’s love is given through our homosexual relationship. In common with other people who do not have children to raise, we are free from those demands to nurture other vital things. This includes our meeting and the wider Society of Friends.

We both draw on our love a great deal to give us the strength and courage to do the things to which God calls us.... Our spiritual journey is a shared one. Sometimes the pitcher needs to be taken back to the fountain. In order to grow, I need my church to bless and uphold not just me as an individual, but also our relationship.

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—Gordon Macphail, c.1985

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Several years ago I had the experience of feeling called to go speak in love and friendship to an old friend who had shunned me. I was very nervous. He might reject my friendship. I might make a fool of myself. But as I walked to his house, I felt that I was carried by something bigger than myself. Afterwards, I felt elated. I had answered the call. Clearly God had been with me, directing and supporting.

—Patience Schenck, 1988

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About 50 years ago, the Second World War began and I was sent away from London, the city of my birth, into the country to avoid the bombing. My father was in the war in North Africa, and my mother was a cook for the Royal Air Force. I lived in a small cottage with my grandparents. Food was scarce and strictly rationed. The house was lit by oil lamps and heated with wood and coal, and my jobs included gathering wood in the nearby forest, and fetching water from the spring in a pail every morning.

When the war was over, we went back to London, and the only place we could find to live in was a converted warehouse that was wet and unsanitary, where in due course I caught a disease and became completely paralysed.

Happily, I recovered the use of most of my limbs, but I never recovered my health. To this day, I cannot lift, or run, ride a bicycle or dance, and I have never been able to romp with my children in the way other people take for granted.

That might sound a fairly unhappy story of deprivation, illness, and disability, but in fact it is not. As time has gone by, I have seen with increasing clarity that these things are a blessing, and were the gifts of God to me. I know this to be the truth, and I know it through the Spirit.

—John Punshon, 1991

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Following the operation all sense of God disappeared, and anyone who came to my bedside (and the love and visiting I received was one of the great treasures of my life) I asked to take my hand and mediate God’s love to me. In fact healing and prayer surrounded

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me on every hand, although I myself felt cut off in complete inner aridity except when actually held in the inner place by someone taking my hand and praying.

—Damaris Parker-Rhodes, 1985

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We all know about the traditional antagonism between Quakerism and the Arts. At Swarthmore College, when I was there in the forties, there was no studio art offered. The Quaker emphasis was definitely on the social sciences, and the feeling was strong that one would be expected to contribute to society in a social-activist kind of way. Nevertheless, I aspired to be an artist; I also joined the Quaker meeting there. That these two avenues were incompatible was obvious by the clichés that were then available concerning Art and Quakerism. The artist was a proverbially selfish person, bound to do his or her own thing at the expense, if necessary, of society. He or she was given to exhibitionist promotion and passionate emotional extremes, and offered a product that was suspiciously commercial or superfluously decorative.

The Quaker, on the other hand, was geared to the needs of society and ready to offer his or her own life for the good of others; was not going to waste time in trivial pursuits, and was solidly grounded, with an emotional and productive life very much under control.

Well, my ideas have come a long way since then. This was all a very exterior view of the outside from the outside. What I missed at that stage of my life was that the artist and the Quaker are on the same internal journey. Each is seeking a relationship with the Divine, and each is seeking a way to express that relationship. There are just many different ways of expressing it. For many, the path to the Self has to be entered by way of the arts, whether or not we are gifted in that field. That doesn't seem to matter. As St. Paul says: If we have not love, we are as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And for many of us, the pathway to love is through the arts.... The process of working with and forming material things can lead beyond them to the spiritual, and shape of clay or colors of paint can be a window into another world.

—Janet Mustin, 1992

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My first experience of healing came when I was very ill for many weeks with lung and respiratory problems and in an extremely physically weak condition. Whilst fighting for each very painful breath I began to think I might not recover and lay in a twilight world of sleep, pain, and exhaustion but yet knowing “Thy will be done.” It would have been so easy to let life slip at this point, but it was exactly then that I felt a surge of energy go through my body and I knew that it was right for me to be given more time on earth and that I would recover. It felt as if I was being “ticked off” for lacking faith. As that energy passed through me I remembered clearly and strongly a very dear member of my Meeting and wondered if she was praying for my recovery. I continued to hold on to her image in my mind and began to feel the strength returning to my body. She later told me she had indeed prayed for me daily and had sometimes been joined by other Friends for intercession. I knew experientially I had been upheld in God’s healing light and power, and it is this experience which has made me so convinced of the healing ministry. I know there may be more mundane, matter-of-fact explanations for my recovery but in extremis and in great need I was reaching for far more than the mundane.

—Joolz Saunders, 1994

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[An] unforgettable experience occurred while I was a student nurse in a city hospital. I was on night duty in the infants ward. When the doctor made his rounds I went with him. As we came to Peter’s cot, the doctor said:

“He will not live through the night. Don’t even call me for him. I can write out his death certificate tomorrow morning. But if you find spare time, carry him around.” That night I carried Peter around for several hours, and mine was an unforeseen reward: a glance into a human soul. Here I was, a young student nurse, an agnostic who did not believe in the existence of a soul, in the value of religion. That night I saw a human life unfolding in front of my eyes. It covered the whole cycle of life—from beginning to end.

When I picked him up, Peter was an infant with the face and expression of an infant. While I held him he passed through all stages of life. His face and expression changed from a young child to an adult and then to an old wise man. There was no pain in his face—no doubt—no fear. He did not fight death. He seemed to

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know his way. He was very serene. He looked straight at me. It seemed that he wanted me to know what he knew. He understood, and he wanted me to understand, too. Peter died in my arms. I closed his eyes and put him in his cot. “Yes”, I thought, “This is not a broken-off life, nipped off in the beginning. It is a fulfilled life. Peter has lived his whole life.”

—Ilse Karger, 1995

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I was by now high up on the moraine. The lazy clouds, that had hung all day as a light veiling about the snow-powdered rock peaks were just breaking up in the clear splendour of sunset. The dazzling mantles of Combin and Courbassiere caught the last rays. It was no moment for reasoning. Too often my spiritual life runs shamefully shallow, lamentably in need of more living water from the eternal springs. May I be pardoned—I was utterly unworthy—but at that moment there swept over me unbidden, the experience of Christ. No more tiresome ratiocination, interpretations or mis-interpretations, dogmas and differences. Just the fact that, in Christ, God was and is sharing the tragedy and sorrow, and the joy of the world. And—most glorious assurance—in his death and resurrection he faced the worst the world can do, faced these same problems and perplexities with all their mental anguish, which so often beat us till we cry inwardly for quarter—Christ faced them and triumphed over them and through them, with and for man in his struggle after righteousness, for all time.

—Corder Catchpool, 1956

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My sunrise meditation means more to me now than ever. At dawn it is easier to feel the universe is one organic whole, held together by that Radiating Power of Love which flows through everything—including thee and me....

By using the power of mature, redemptive love we can show each individual that we need his or her uniqueness to make us whole. We will then see that we have something to give others and that others have something to give us.

—Rachel Davis DuBois, c. 1978

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(5 a.m.) Something is happening around me: the dark is less dark, the silence is less deep. Even the air is changing. It is damper, sweeter. Morning is at hand. Light will soon come flowing over the edge of the world, bringing with it the day. What a gift! Whether wrapped in streamers of color or folded in tissues of mist, it will be mine to use in ways that I can foresee and in those that are unexpected. The day will make its own revelation, bring its own challenge; my part will be to respond with joy and gladness.  
—Elizabeth Yates, 1976

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It may seem paradoxical for me to say that I would not have missed the experiences of those two years of my life in a Nazi prison for anything. But it is so. When one’s existence, which has seemed quite secure, suddenly melts away, when one is cut off...from the circle of one’s family and friends, and must rely entirely on one’s self in an indifferent, hostile world; when the ground is taken from under one’s feet and the air one breathes is taken away, when every security fails and every support gives way—then one stands face to face with the Eternal, and confronts Him without protection and with fearful directness.  
—Eva Hermann, c. 1947

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At home when I was a small child there had been little to suggest to me the restriction placed upon women in the outside world. Our family sitting room was presided over by a large steel engraving of Elizabeth Fry in Quaker cap and flowing Quaker dress. When I joined the family group around the fire after supper there she hung, an imposing figure on the wall above me. We all honored her because she had visited the cruel British prisons of her day and reformed them. According to Quaker theory women were the equals of men, the two sexes facing each other “with level-fronting eyelids,” a phrase I often heard. And in practice twice a week at the Sunday and Thursday morning meetings for worship I saw my mother sit opposite, even though a little below, my father in the raised gallery for ministers and elders. On the one occasion when I attended a joint business session of the Men’s and Women’s Monthly Meeting, as I pushed open the door at the far end of the room I saw my mother and my father seated side by side in solitary state before a long table

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littered with papers. They performed respectively the duties of the clerk of the Men’s and clerk of the Women’s meeting. I remember the sharp stab of pride I felt as I stood in the doorway to look at my parents.

—Helen Thomas Flexner, 1940

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It happened in the night. I was at a very low point. I was sleeping out of doors on the porch close to the hill. A light breeze rustled through the overhanging branches of a great walnut tree. I was very tired. I looked up at the stars edging over the hill in my mood of great despondency. I said to God, “It’s no use. I’ve tried all I can. I can’t do anything more.” All of a sudden I seemed to be swept bodily out of my bed, carried above the trees and held poised in mid-air, surrounded by light—a light so bright that I could hardly look at it. Even when I closed my eyes I could feel it. A fragrance as of innumerable orange blossoms inundated my senses. And there was an echo of far-off music. All was ecstasy. I have no idea whether it lasted a minute or several hours. But for the rest of the night I lay in a state of peace and indescribable joy. How impossible it is to explain such a phenomenon in everyday language, but whatever it was changed my life. It was not a passing illusion. I never was the same again. For days I was terribly happy. The whole world seemed to be illumined, the flower colors were brighter, bird songs gayer, and people were kind, friendly and loving. This exaggerated brilliance faded somewhat with time and the intense sense of communion fluctuated. Later on there were, of course, low moments amidst the high peaks, and there were failures, dry seasons, and the recurring need for patience and perseverance. But I never lost the clarification of mind and spirit that was revealed to me on that night.

—Josephine Duvenek, 1978

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In my younger days I felt unsure and afraid of life, but the experience of God through Quakerism has created an inner ground of harmony and deep security, something not originating from my own power, not grasped by my intellect, yet with roots within myself. God is in life itself, in silence, in fellowship, in nature, in absorption in service for others.

I experience God unexpectedly, without premeditated device or plan; I “happen” to meet those who just then and there need help or

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contact, and I experience God in action. Something guides me without my knowing. Praying for others is to me a kind of telepathy with God geared in.

—Elsa Cedergren, 20th Century

### **Living and Dying**

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Now is where we live, now is where the past must be overcome, now is where we meet others, now is where we must find the presence of God.

—Carol Murphy, c.1993

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To many people throughout history, God has been intensely real because they have found that they can experience communion with God. But such experience is not gained without persistence. We must listen; we must make time to step aside, even from good works, in order to talk with God. Sometimes a physical withdrawal is not possible, but when communion has become a constant attitude of mind it is deeply satisfying because it fulfills our need for the companionship of someone who loves us in spite of our failings.

—Kathleen Lonsdale, 1962

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This relatedness of all life, as it binds us to all that has passed, surely binds us to the future as well. So the divine spark kindled in us can never really be extinguished, for it is part of a universal flame.

Once we have squarely faced the inescapable fact of our own death, we need never fear it, but turn and live life to the hilt, as we have seen that it should be lived. Then, whether that life be long or short, it will have been a full one.

Life is a gift so precious that we would accept it on any terms rather than never to have had it. Even among the poorest and most deprived—and especially among them, as I often thought in India—you see this zest for, this clinging to life. But we get more than the gift itself. We get life with the guarantee that it does conform to universal laws which affect and control every scrap of living matter. How much this gives us!—minds that can work in harmony with others, skills we can learn and transmit, health, zest for food and love, the absolute assurance that the laws are fixed, and not things

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that alter with a flippant changefulness from day to day.

—Bradford Smith, 1965

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There are clearly-marked signposts which, if followed, lead the way to recovery. First there has to be the wish, however transient, to find the way to better things. It is the beginning of hope, that basic ingredient for all life. From there, confidence and belief develop, and the certainty that in spite of all evidence to the contrary, good is in us and around us offering support. In such a situation of positive thinking we cease to be dreamers and accept fully our present lot. It is the material from which we are to build our future, whether long or short in time.... The remarkable discovery we can make is that love has not deserted us, and that it is available to us now in a new way. Our own willingness to love and to give in the world about us is the secret of recovery and the new beginning.

—Margaret Torrie, 1975

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I am convinced it is a great art to know how to grow old gracefully, and I am determined to practice it.... I always thought I should love to grow old, and I find it is even more delightful than I thought. It is so delicious to be done with things and to feel no need any longer to concern myself much about earthly affairs.... I am tremendously content to let one activity after another go, and to wait quietly and happily the opening of the door at the end of the passageway that will let me into my real abiding place.

—Hannah Whitall Smith, 1903

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I have been learning... that when we accept our finiteness realistically and without bitterness, each day is a gift to be cherished and savored. Each day becomes a miracle. I am learning to offer to God my days and my nights, my joy, my work, my pain, and my grief. I am striving to keep my house in order, and my relationships intact. I am learning to use the time I have more wisely.... And I am learning to forget at times my puritan conscience which prods me to work without ceasing, and instead, to take time for joy.

—Elizabeth Watson, 1979

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One of life’s hardest lessons is that there is no justification for expecting that our neighbour is to traverse precisely the same path as that which we ourselves have followed.... The difficulty a man has in grasping this truth is increased in proportion as his own experience has been vivid and clearly defined. One who has been lifted out of the horrible pit, has had his feet set upon a rock, and a new song put into his mouth, finds it hard to believe that another who has arrived quietly and without crisis, with no strong consciousness of guilt and no corresponding ecstasy of deliverance, can really be a disciple at all.

—William Littleboy, 1916

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Those of us known as “activists” have sometimes been hurt by the written or spoken implication that we must be spending too little time on our spiritual contemplative lives. I do know many atheists who are active in improving the lot of humankind; but, for those of us who are Friends, our attendance at meeting for worship and our silent prayerful times are what make our outer activity viable and effective—if it is effective.

I have similarly seen quieter Friends hurt by the implication that they do not care enough, because they are not seen to be “politically active”. Some worry unnecessarily that they may be doing things of a “less important” nature, as if to be seen doing things by the eyes of the world is the same thing as to be seen doing things by the eyes of God.... I suggest that we refrain from judging each other, or belittling what each is doing; and that we should not feel belittled. We cannot know the prayers that others make or do not make in their own times of silent aloneness. We cannot know the letters others may be writing to governments.... We were made differently, in order to perform different tasks. Let us rejoice in our differences.

—Margaret Glover, 1989

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The practice of journal keeping is ... a way of becoming aware of the patterns of our inner life, of growing in self-knowledge and discovering our own gifts and possibilities.... Keeping a journal is just one way ... of beginning to re-create your life. At its most basic it is a decision that your life has value and meaning and deserves the

## ***Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6***

effort of recollection and reflection. It is also a decision that what you are living and learning is worth recording. That decision has its roots in a very deep layer of gospel truth.

—Jo Farrow, 1986

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The secret of finding joy after sorrow, or through sorrow, lies, I think, in the way we meet sorrow itself. We cannot fight against it and overcome it, though often we try and may seem at first successful. We try to be stoical, to suppress our memories...to kill [the pain] with strenuous activity so that we may be too tired to think. But that is just the time when it returns to us in overwhelming power. Or we try to escape from it.... But when the trip is over, the book closed...the research accomplished, there is our sorrow waiting for us, disguised, perhaps, but determined....

What we must do, ... with God’s help, is to accept sorrow as a friend, if possible. If not, as a companion with whom we will live for an indeterminate period, for whom we have to make room as one makes room for a guest in one’s house, a companion of whom we shall always be aware, from whom we can learn and whose strength will become our strength. Together we can create beauty from ashes and find ourselves in the process.

—Elizabeth Gray Vining, 1952

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Sometimes religion appears to be presented as offering easy cures for pain: have faith and God will mend your hurts; reach out to God and your woundedness will be healed. The Beatitude “Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted” can be interpreted this way too, but the Latin root of the word “comfort” means “with strength” rather than “at ease.” The Beatitude is not promising to take away our pain; indeed the inference is that the pain will remain with us. It does promise that God will cherish us and our wound, and help us draw a blessing from our distressed state.

—S. Jocelyn Burnell, 1989

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I’ve gone to many kinds of schools, but of all the courses in the university of life, the course in old age is the hardest; the one with the most lessons to learn. Your own generation is gone. You can no longer count on your intellect or your memory. Your hearing lets

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you down. You can't keep track of things and you're constantly misplacing them. But you learn so much. You learn to accept help and to remember with your heart. To live always with the generations that went before, with those alive now, and with the generations to come—all that we must surely learn. In one way life is like a mountain climb, and we keep going steadily upward toward our death. And when we meet it, when Brother Death comes and gives us permission to go on across the frontier, then we must meet him with thankfulness, only with thankfulness.

—Emilia Fogelklou, 1985

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Friends do not take readily to being cared for. “Caring matters most” has been quoted to us when seeking direction during our active years. But many of us will find that we ourselves are in need of full care in our old age. This will not be easy. It calls for “a different kind of living”, as one Friend commented when answering questions about experience in a home for the elderly. Uprooted from familiar well-loved things, of house and neighbours, released from stabilising responsibilities (however small), there will be adjustments to be made.

But there are compensations and opportunities. Loss of physical well-being can bring a new experience of the strength of the Spirit which can overcome pain and suffering. A new and fuller understanding of prayer can come, given the time to study and practise how to pray. And in the experience of living in a Home with others, a deep sense of sharing the darkness and the light can lead to a sense of community not known before. Finally, living close to physical death (our own and that of others), we come to recognise death as a natural and often welcome event. Yet another movement of growth into the fullness of the knowledge of God.

—Margaret McNeill, 1990

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A moral code, even when accepted for the best of reasons, necessarily tends to be negative rather than positive, to be concerned with “Thou shalt not” rather than with what an individual should give to his fellows. We are much concerned about the whole content of human relationship, about the meaning of “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” in the full range and depth of its implications. Loving does not merely mean doing good works; it

## ***Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6***

goes further than feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. It means warmth and intimacy, open-heartedness and overwhelming generosity of hand and spirit. It means a desire to know and a courageous willingness to be known. Loving implies commitment to the other person, involvement in that person’s life, whatever it may cost in suffering, whether that suffering comes through being repudiated or through identification and sharing.

The life of society desperately needs this warmth of giving and receiving. Everywhere we see sociability without commitment or intimacy and, especially in our towns, intense isolation and loneliness. We see human energy that should be creative and loving deflected into activities that are coldly power-seeking; we see love inhibited, frustrated, or denied, turning into its opposite—into ruthlessness and aggression.

—A Group of Friends, London Yearly Meeting, 1963

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People so often talk of someone “getting over” a death. How could you ever fully get over a deep loss? Life has been changed profoundly and irrevocably. You don’t get over sorrow; you work your way right to the centre of it.

—Diana Lampen, 1979

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As I grow older, I seem to need more time for inner stillness.... This can happen in the midst of daily chores or when walking in a crowd or riding in a train. It means being still, open, reflective, holding within myself the crucible of joy and pain of all the world, and lifting it up to God. Praise comes into it, and thankfulness for all the love I have known and shared, the realization of how much of the time I am carried, supported, upheld by others and the love of God. [During this process] comes the deep sense of the unity of all being, the intermeshing of the animate and inanimate, the secular and the sacred, the tangible and the intangible....it means just waiting, or just lifting the heart.

—Dorothy Steere, 1995

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## **Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6**

<http://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/queries/3-spiritual-nurture-ministry-and-religious-education/>

### **3. Spiritual Nurture, Ministry, and Religious Education**

Does our Meeting encourage the ministry of both word and deed? How does our Meeting recognize, develop, and nurture the gifts of our members and attenders of all ages?

Does our Meeting prepare all its members and children for worship and for a way of life consistent with the principles of the Religious Society of Friends? How do we teach about Quaker practices in business and worship and their importance to the functioning of our Meeting community?

In what ways do we support each other in order to seek God’s will and act upon our understanding of truth? Is there opportunity in our Meeting to share the excitement of religious discovery and the possibility of religious transformation?

Does our Meeting provide opportunities for all in the Meeting to learn about:

the Inner Light, the living Christ within, the Bible, the writings of Friends, our Christian heritage, other religious traditions and their respective roles in the history and formation of Friends’ principles?

the common testimonies Friends declare?

the variety of expression Quaker faith takes today?

*Do I maintain as part of my personal and family life those daily practices that focus on continued spiritual growth, with disciplined worship, inward retirement, and communion with the divine spirit?*

*Do I frequently read the Bible and other religious literature, including the records of the lives and experiences of Friends? Do I take the time to explore these resources with others, and likewise encourage my children?*

*Do I share my own faith and spiritual journey, and encourage such sharing within my family?*

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## **Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6**

<http://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/queries/4-care-for-the-meeting-community/>

### **4. Care for the Meeting Community**

#### **4A. Care for one another**

Are love and unity maintained among us? When conflicts exist, are they faced with patience, forbearance, and openness to healing? Are avenues for exploring differences kept open? To what extent does our Meeting ignore differences in order to avoid possible conflicts?

Is the Meeting a safe, loving place? When we become aware of someone’s need, do we offer assistance? Are the meetinghouse and the Meeting property physically accessible to all?

Do all adults and children in our Meeting receive our loving care and encouragement to share in the life of our Meeting, and to live as Friends? Do we truly welcome newcomers and include them in our Meeting community?

When a member’s conduct or manner of living gives cause for concern, how does the Meeting respond?

How does our Meeting keep in touch with all its members?

*Am I ready to offer assistance as part of my religious community serving its members? Am I equally willing to accept graciously the help of others?*

*Do I recognize and face disagreements and other situations that put me in conflict with others? Do I manifest a spirit ready to give or receive forgiveness?*

*Do I treat adults and children alike with respect and without condescension? Is my manner with visitors and attenders to my Meeting one of welcome?*

#### **4B. Care in my home**

(This set of personal queries may be helpful for the family to consider within the family setting. Families may also wish to explore other General Queries as part of regular family worship.)

*Is my home a place where all members of the family receive affection and understanding, and where visitors are welcome? Do I choose recreation and a manner of living that enriches the body, mind, and spirit; and shows a high regard for family, community, and creation?*

## **Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6**

*Is our family prepared to discuss such sensitive topics as death, faith, money, even sex and drugs, in a manner that allows openness and honesty, and also direction?*

*How do I help to arrange life at home so that there is an opportunity for all to learn and absorb by example what it means to live a life of Spirit-led commitment?*

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<http://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/queries/9-ministry-of-outreach/>

### **9. Ministry of Outreach**

#### **Outreach**

What are we doing as a Meeting to communicate our presence and our principles to the community around us? Does our Meeting’s ministry of outreach lead Friends to share their spiritual experiences with others?

What are we doing to invite persons not in membership to attend our meetings for worship and to encourage their continued attendance? How does the Meeting welcome visitors? Are we sensitive to the needs and hesitations of each visitor?

Are we tender to the needs of isolated Friends and Meetings, and to nearby Meetings seeking support?

*How do I ground myself in the understandings of my faith? Am I clear about my beliefs? How do I prepare myself to share my faith and beliefs with others?*

*Does my manner of life as a Friend attract others to our religious society?*

*Do I seize opportunities to tell others about the Religious Society of Friends and invite them to worship with us?*

*Is my manner with visitors and attenders to our Meeting one of welcome?*

#### **Collaboration**

In what ways does our Meeting respond to opportunities to join with other faiths in worship, in social action, and in spiritual dialogue?

How does our Meeting encourage its members to seek opportunities to meet and work with Friends world wide?

*What opportunities have I taken to know people from different*

## **Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6**

*religious and cultural backgrounds, to worship with them, and to work with them on common concerns?*

*What opportunities have I taken to know, to work, and to worship with Friends outside of my own Meeting?*

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<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-2/chapter-2/caring-community> [pp. 119-124]

### **The Meeting as a Caring Community**

The nature of their purpose and quest as Friends binds members of a meeting and of the whole Society into an intimate fellowship whose unity is not threatened by the diversity of leadings and experiences which may come to individual Friends. To share in the experience of the Presence in corporate worship, to strive to let Divine Will guide one’s life, to uphold others in prayer, to live in a sense of unfailing Love, is to participate in a spiritual adventure in which Friends come to know one another and to respect one another at a level where differences of age or sex, of wealth or position, of education or vocation, of race or nation are all irrelevant. Within this sort of fellowship, as in a family, griefs and joys, fear and hopes, failures and accomplishments are naturally shared, even as individuality and independence are scrupulously respected.

### **The Love Which Abounded Among Us**

*William Caton, a servant in the Fell household, who became a “Publisher of Truth,” wrote as follows:*

Oh the Love which in that Day abounded among us (especially in that Family) and oh the freshness of the power of the Lord God, which then was amongst us; and the Zeal for God and his Truth, the Comfort and Refreshment which we had from his Presence; the nearness and dearness that was amongst us one toward another; the sights, openings and Revelations which we then had! I confess I find myself insufficient to declare these things to the utmost; neither do I now intend to go about to describe the multitude of them particularly: for then I might make a larger Volume by much, than now I am intended; howbeit, my very heart is affected with the remembrance of them at this very day.

And in them days were Meetings exceeding precious to us, insomuch that some few of us did commonly every night, spend sometime more, sometime less time in waiting upon the Lord; yea,

## ***Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6***

often after the rest of the Family were gone to bed: But, Oh the comfort and refreshment which we had together, and the benefit which we reaped thereby, how shall I declare it? For if we had suffered loss in the day time when we had been abroad about our business, or the like, then we came in a great measure to be restored again, through the Love, Power and Mercy of our God, which abounded very much unto us.

—William Caton: *A journal of the life of Will*. Caton, 1689 ed., pp. 6, 7

### ***The Disciples Plus Christ***

The Church is not simply, in the Quaker conception, a fellowship of disciples at work for the Kingdom of God; it is such a fellowship, plus Jesus Christ Himself, in whose Spirit, the Spirit which unites them one to another and to Him, they become together "one flock, one Shepherd."

—W. C. Braithwaite in Braithwaite and Hodgkin: *The message and mission of Quakerism*, 1912, pp. 25-6.

### ***The Art of Christian Caring***

In our Meeting we should learn the art of Christian caring for one another, something more than the expression of natural kindness, or the impulse to hold out a helping hand in moments of disaster, because Quakerism derives not only from the light of nature, but from the light of Christ.... Do we know one another well enough to know one another's needs, what enjoyment *this* one needs to share, from what burden of fear or worry *that* one needs to be set free? The Overseers are the guardians of our watchfulness over one another, but we must all share in it, and be ready to seek and respond to the guidance of God. Only so can He take and use our gifts to meet the needs, sometimes even of those whom we do not know. Into such Meetings a stranger will come and feel that he has come into a group where people are upheld in prayer. From such Meetings our members may go out, even to tasks involving great responsibilities and even great isolation, knowing that they are supported by our understanding, our love, and our prayers.

—*Epistle* of London Y. M., 1960.

## ***Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6***

### ***Living Fellowship Needs Fresh Forms***

Fellowship in a common faith has often brought a religious society into being before it was in any way organized into an institution. It was so with the primitive Church and with the Society of Friends. Organization is a good servant but a bad master; the living fellowship within the Church must remain free to mould organization into the fresh forms demanded by its own growth and the changing needs of the time. Where there is not this freedom the Church has its life cramped by ill-assorted clothes, and its service for the world becomes dwarfed or paralyzed.

—Thomas (Anna L.B.) and Emmott (E.B.): *W. C. Braithwaite, Memoir and papers*, 1931, p. 118. “The widening of the Quaker fellowship,” written 1905.

### ***Concerns and Loyalty***

In the history and experience of the Society of Friends individualism has been co-existent with a strong sense of fellowship and of the whole body. In large part Quakerism can be explained as a tension, a balance, between individual faithfulness and corporate responsibility around a common centre of concern and loyalty. The individual is not really free to act until his concern has been laid before and shared by the whole meeting. The meeting, in its respect for the minority and for personality, must seek the deeper unity; it cannot over-ride or do violence to conscience; it cannot be totalitarian. The spirit of mutual respect and of reconciliation, with patient waiting upon the will of God, makes possible something more than a political unanimity.

—Percy W. Bartlett: *Quakers and the Christian church*, 1941, pp. 14-15. Faith and Order Commission, London Y. M.

### ***No Bond But Love and Fellowship***

By the opening of the eighteenth century the Friends were one people throughout the world, though there was absolutely no bond but love and fellowship. There was no visible head to the Society, no official creed, no ecclesiastical body which held sway and authority. But instead of being an aggregation of separate units the Society was in an extraordinary measure a living group. Friends had suffered together and they were baptised into one spirit. Wherever any Friend was in trouble the world over, all Friends, however remote,

## ***Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6***

were concerned and were ready to help share the trouble if it could be shared. The greatest and the best of the entire Society made their way from meeting to meeting, and from house to house even into the cabin of the settler on the frontier and they wove an invisible bond, stronger than the infallible decrees of Councils, which held the whole body together as an integral unit. Hospitality with the Quaker was not a virtue, it was an unconscious habit.

—Rufus M. Jones: *The Quakers in the American colonies*, 1911, pp. 314-5.

### ***Visiting is a Ministry***

In our Society visiting is a ministry in which many should share. It should not be restricted to any official body in the meeting. It cannot be neglected if inner fellowship is to flourish. Any group within the Society of Friends who have ever tried to establish a new meeting or to revive a dying one know that the first essential is to visit, and the second essential is to visit, and the third essential is to continue visiting. These visits help to draw the meeting for worship into a basic fellowship that can yield to the Spirit. If the members of the meeting know of difficulties that one or another in their midst may be facing, they can literally draw on the bank of God’s healing power for that member.

—Douglas V. Steere: *Community and worship* (Pendle Hill Pamphlet, № 10), 1940, pp. 18-19.

### ***Not to Possess But to Share***

God not only gives, God shares. Through Jesus God shares his Divinity with us. God not only gives love, God shares his love, for love becomes a reality only as it is shared. The more we share, the more we have like the parable of the widow’s cruse of oil.

This same principle is evidently true in regard to all that we call our own possessions. Our whole purpose in life is not to possess, but rather to share. Joy not shared becomes stale—we must tell someone. And sorrow not shared becomes an unbearable burden. Bearing one another’s burdens becomes a reality through experience.

—Levinus K. Painter, “A Christmas meditation,” 1980.

## ***Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6***

### ***Corporate Life Fostered***

This note of fellowship, and of a corporate binding in the life of God, is of special importance. However fully it has been realised by others, it is in fact the single dominant characteristic of Quakerism throughout the history of the Society. It appears in sharp contrast to the anarchical and individualist tendencies of much so-called “spiritual” experience. Where these appear, whether in earlier or later times, they are condemned by a strong common sense. The danger of the more intimate type of spiritual fellowship lies precisely in the tendency to hold the private experience as valid without an adequate check by the community as a whole. Within the Society, Friends have sought to recognise and guard against this danger. From early days the corporate life was fostered with care, while the whole body, likewise, cared for the life and service of the individual. Thus the ideal of a free ministry, with free maintenance during its exercise, was at a very early date associated with the care of the poor and distressed, especially those suffering in the cause of truth. —London Y. M.: *The nature of the Christian church*, 1945, p. 12. Committee on Christian Relationships, London Y. M.

### ***Inward Seeking, Outward Acts***

The core of the Quaker tradition is a way of inward seeking which leads to outward acts of integrity and service. Friends are most in the Spirit when they stand at the crossing point of the inward and the outward life. And that is the intersection at which we find community. Community is a place where the connections felt in the heart make themselves known in bonds between people, and where the tuggings and pullings of those bonds keep opening up our hearts.

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 corporate worship which opens itself to continuing revelation. —Parker J. Palmer: *A place called community*, (Pendle Hill Pamphlet, № 212), 1977, p. 27

### ***Living in Solitude and Community***

I am convinced that to be a complete Christian is to learn to live both in isolation and community. The group-minded must overcome

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his fear of solitude by the living practise of the belief that nothing but sin can separate him from God; the solitary must overcome his dread of his fellows by the living practice of the belief that “there is that of God in every one.” Those who know communion with God most easily in isolation do not always realise that the Bread of Heaven on which they feed is given them for others as at the Last Supper, it must be broken and passed on. Those who know communion with God most easily through a group will only find in solitude whether they are depending on him or on their fellowmen.

—Beatrice Saxon Snell: *A joint and visible fellowship*, (Pendle Hill Pamphlet, № 140), 1965, p. 7

### ***Nurturing a Spirit of Community***

Friends have discovered, therefore, that there are two primary ways of nurturing a spirit of community: through encouraging the sensitivity of individual persons as they endeavor to be responsive to the Light of Christ Within in their work and worship; and through fostering their outward concern and care for one another.

—George A. Selleck: *Quakers in Boston, 1656-1964*, 1976, p. 270.

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<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-4/chapter-2>

<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-4/chapter-2/basis> [p. 235]

### **Basis of Membership**

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends, as a part of the Christian fellowship, is both a privilege and a responsibility. Ideally, it is the outward sign of an inner experience of the Living God and of unity with the other members of a living body. It implies a commitment to enter wholeheartedly into the spiritual and corporate activities of the Society and to assume responsibility for both service and support, as way opens. Faith in God and an effort to follow the life and teachings of Jesus under the guidance and authority of the Light Within are the bases of our Quaker faith. The Society should reach out to and welcome into active membership all who find unity with the principles and the testimonies of Friends, as reflected in this book of Faith and Practice.

Only monthly meetings are empowered to accept individuals into membership and to record them as members of the Religious Society of Friends. Membership in a monthly meeting entails membership in the quarterly meeting, the New England Yearly

## ***Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6***

Meeting, the Friends United Meeting, the Friends General Conference, and the Friends World Committee for Consultation.

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<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-4/chapter-2/becoming-member> [pp. 235-238]

## **Becoming a Member**

### ***Preparation***

Personal and group worship is the vital center of Friends’ religious life. It is important that those who desire to join the Society of Friends attend meeting for worship regularly. Regular attendance at the meeting for worship establishes personal responsibility for sharing in the search for divine guidance, a responsibility that must continue if membership is to be fruitful both for the individual and for the group.

By careful reading of this book of Faith and Practice, by discussion with meeting members, and by study of the literature interpreting Friends’ beliefs, applicants can gain a sympathetic understanding of Friends’ mode of worship, the transaction of business, and the responsibilities of membership.

### ***Application***

When, on the basis of this understanding, a person feels moved to apply for membership, application should be made in writing to the monthly meeting. The letter should state why the applicant feels drawn into the fellowship of Friends, and to what extent he or she is in unity with Friends’ principles and testimonies. Before the application is considered by the monthly meeting, it is sent to Ministry and Counsel. When an applicant for membership brings a letter from another religious denomination, this document should also be presented to Ministry and Counsel together with the applicant’s own letter.

Ministry and Counsel or Friends appointed by Ministry and Counsel will instruct and guide the applicant as seems appropriate. They should inquire by personal visits into the applicant’s earnestness and conviction concerning Friends’ principles, and they should satisfy themselves that the applicant desires to live in a manner consistent with these principles. Although preparatory

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proceedings, outlined above, have been followed, nevertheless the method and spirit in which Friends' meetings for worship and for business are conducted should be carefully explained to the applicant, together with such responsibilities implied by membership as faithful attendance at meetings for worship and business, service on committees, a willingness to share a just portion of the financial support of the meeting, and participation in larger Friends' groups.

If Ministry and Counsel reports favorably, the monthly meeting may then receive the applicant into membership. If Friends feel the need to become better acquainted with the prospective member, action may be postponed. Sometimes a special committee is appointed to call on the applicant as a means of facilitating better acquaintance.

When an application has been approved, the monthly meeting records the acceptance into membership, furnishes the new member with a copy of the approving minute, and may appoint a welcoming committee.

An application for membership in the monthly meeting which comes with a letter releasing the applicant from another denomination is dealt with in the same way as described above. A Friend wishing to reaffirm membership which is held as a result of parental request (see [Membership by Parental Request](#)) also follows this procedure.

Other applications may come by certificates of transfer of membership from another monthly meeting. Although the last will ordinarily be dealt with without delay, all these applications are initially referred to Ministry and Counsel.

### ***Membership by Parental Request***

Monthly meetings record minor children as junior members upon

- a. request of both parents if they are members of the meeting;
- b. request of a member parent and consent of a non-member parent;
- c. request of a guardian; and
- d. under other appropriate circumstances upon recommendation of Ministry and Counsel.

Members so recorded are counted in the monthly meeting's statistical reports.

## ***Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6***

Enrolling children as junior members in this way is an expression of the conviction that children and young people have a special interest in and claim upon the Society. It should earnestly foster their spiritual well-being and growth. As spiritual maturity develops in parallel with an understanding of Quaker principles, such members are expected when the time seems right to express in writing to Ministry and Counsel their wish to affirm and continue their membership in the monthly meeting. (See Chapter 3, [Duties of Ministry and Counsel](#).) Ministry and Counsel then meets with the Friend, just as in the case of a new application for membership, and reports to the monthly meeting for business on the suitability of the proposed continuation of membership. The monthly meeting will welcome this letter whenever the junior member feels moved to write it; this should be no later than age twenty-five unless the member expresses in writing to the meeting a need for more time to consummate the decision. At age twenty-five any such junior member who has neither written in this way to the monthly meeting nor indicated a likelihood of doing so shortly thereafter will be removed from the rolls; but it will be made clear that a future application for membership will be considered sympathetically by the monthly meeting.

Junior members should be encouraged to attend both meeting for worship and meeting for business and also, if it can be arranged, to work as members of meeting committees. Some meetings appoint for each junior member an older Friend to serve as counselor, with whom the boy or girl might feel free to discuss the development of religious faith and the responsibilities of meeting membership.

### ***Sojourning Membership***

A monthly meeting may accept as sojourning members persons maintaining membership in other Friends' meetings who wish to be associated with the local monthly meeting while residing temporarily within its area. Their wishes in this connection should be set forth by minutes or letters from their home meetings. It is expected of such members that they will share as fully as they conveniently can in all aspects of the meeting's activities, including meeting for worship, meeting for business, committee service, and financial support.

Such membership is not counted in statistical reports and ceases when the host meeting informs the home meeting that the

## ***Readings for “Quaker Basics”, Week 6***

sojourner has left the area of the meeting or has become inactive.

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<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-4/chapter-2/non-resident> [p. 238]

### **Non-Resident Members**

Monthly meetings should keep in touch with members living at a distance, including those sojourning in another meeting. At least once a year a personal letter with a message of kindly interest and inquiry into the Friend's religious life and activities should be sent to each non-resident member, particularly those who are separated from Friendly associations. When appropriate, members should be advised of the advantages of transferring membership to a meeting in their immediate neighborhood, or, if their absence is temporary, of becoming sojourning members in such a meeting. In either case, they should request a minute from their home meeting to be sent to the monthly meeting with which they wish to be associated.

If no information has been or can be received from a member for a period of three years, the monthly meeting may at its discretion remove the name from the list of members.

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<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-4/chapter-2/transfer-removal> [pp. 238-240]

### **Transfer and Removal of Membership**

#### ***Transfer by Certificate***

A member of a monthly meeting living beyond the meeting's reasonable limits should arrange for the transfer of membership to a more conveniently located meeting, preferably the one where residence has been established. Not doing so means a loss both to the individual and to the meetings involved, as well as failure to assume the full responsibilities of membership. When a monthly meeting receives a request for transfer, careful inquiry should be made by Ministry and Counsel to ascertain the conditions of the Friend's religious and temporal affairs. At the discretion of the monthly meeting, a certificate of transfer (see [Appendix 2](#)) should be issued when a member requests it or, in default of such a request, when the monthly meeting deems it appropriate.

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When a certificate is received, it should be referred to Ministry and Counsel. It should be accepted promptly by the monthly meeting unless sufficient reason shall appear to the contrary. Until this is done, the Friend remains a member of the former monthly meeting. In every case the monthly meeting receiving a certificate of transfer should inform the meeting which issued it of the action taken. One or more Friends may be appointed to visit the transferred member and to extend a welcome.

A certificate of transfer should be issued only to a monthly meeting and should be sent to the clerk. If the member requesting a transfer is a recorded minister, this fact should be noted on the certificate of transfer.

### ***Joining Other Bodies***

If a member in good standing wishes to unite with some other religious denomination, the monthly meeting may grant a letter of recommendation (see [Appendix 2](#)), whereupon membership with Friends shall cease. Any member who unites with another denomination without having requested a letter of recommendation from the monthly meeting shall be dropped from the rolls and informed of this action.

### ***Resignations***

When a member resigns, the monthly meeting is advised to appoint a committee to visit in a tender spirit and to inquire into the cause of the action. If the Friend’s purpose continues unchanged and the meeting accedes, a minute may be drafted granting the Friend’s request for release, and the Friend shall be furnished a copy of this minute.

### ***Discontinuance***

When any member habitually neglects attendance at meeting, fails to contribute to its support, or in other ways evidences a lack of unity with Friends, the monthly meeting upon recommendation of Ministry and Counsel may remove the Friend’s name from its list of members and should so inform the person concerned.

When any member’s conduct is considered unbecoming a Friend, Ministry and Counsel should bring the matter to the

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attention of the monthly meeting. The monthly meeting shall appoint a committee to confer with the Friend in question. If the committee considers that the Friend is in error, it should endeavor in a spirit of love and tenderness to engender that state of mind and heart that will enable renewed fellowship with the meeting. If the exercise of due care and forbearance appears to be of no avail, the meeting should remove the Friend's name from its list of members and should so inform the person concerned.

A Friend whose membership has been discontinued by the monthly meeting may, if dissatisfied with the decision, file an appeal with the quarterly meeting within three months for a review of the matter. If either the Friend whose membership is in question or the monthly meeting concerned is dissatisfied with the decision of the quarterly meeting, an appeal may be addressed to the Permanent Board of the Yearly Meeting. The decision of the Permanent Board shall be final.

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<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-4/chapter-2/membership-records> [p. 240]

### **Membership Records**

The acceptance and issuance of all certificates and letters should be recorded in the minutes of the monthly meeting, and the list of members should be changed accordingly. An accurate list of members should be appended to the monthly meeting minutes every ten years, beginning with the first monthly meeting in 1985.

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<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-4/chapter-5/responsibilities-summarized> [pp. 254-256]

### **Responsibilities Summarized**

A condensation of the duties of individuals may prove useful:

#### ***Responsibilities of the Persons to be Married***

1. To write a letter to the clerk of the monthly meeting under whose care they wish to be married, signed by both bride and groom, stating their intention of marriage and enclosing, if available, the blessings of their families.
2. To meet with a designated committee of clearness and to supply

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relevant documents and references as arranged before hand.

3. To write a second letter to the clerk for presentation to the session of the monthly meeting at which the committee on clearness makes its report, requesting permission to be married in a regular or appointed meeting (the latter is more usual) and proposing, if they so desire, the names of Friends they suggest to serve as a committee of oversight for the wedding. The day, hour, and place where they desire to have the marriage take place should be included.
4. To refrain from sending wedding invitations until the proposed marriage is allowed by the meeting.
5. To meet with the committee of oversight at a time and place suggested by the committee to discuss plans for the wedding and reception to follow, including such matters as any proposed change in the wording of the vows, the choice of persons to read the marriage certificate and to close the meeting for worship.
6. To have the Friends’ marriage certificate prepared in ample time. Information concerning the details involved in this part of the procedure may be had at the office of the Yearly Meeting. (See [Appendix 3, B.](#))
7. To inform themselves of the legal requirements of the state in which the marriage is to take place, and to obtain the forms to be used to comply with them.
8. To be sure that the license is given to the committee of oversight before the wedding and that the marriage certificate is present at the wedding.
9. To commit to memory long before the wedding day the promises to be made to each other.
10. To sign the marriage certificate after the promises have been made.

### ***Responsibilities of the Clerk***

1. To present the letter of intention to marry and the letters from the parents or guardians, if available, to the monthly meeting immediately following the receipt of them.
2. To see that the committees on clearness report to the monthly meeting.
3. When the report has been accepted:
  - a. To request that the meeting appoint a committee of oversight for the wedding and also that it grant

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permission for a meeting for worship to be held at the time and place requested for the wedding.

- b. To inform the bride and groom that they are free to proceed with their plans.
4. To sign the marriage license and deliver it to the appropriate civil authorities.

### ***Responsibilities of the Committee on Cleanness***

1. To make inquiry and conscientiously satisfy itself that there is nothing to interfere with the accomplishment of the marriage. The bride and groom should be visited together as well as individually. The two women Friends inquire into the bride's cleanness for proceeding in the marriage, and the two men Friends make similar inquiries of the groom. Neither reticence nor timidity should prevent discussing any subject relevant to the marriage.
2. To report its findings and recommendations to a subsequent session of the monthly meeting.
3. To make available books and pamphlets on marriage, and, when appropriate, to refer the bride and groom to an available marriage counselor.
4. To be informed concerning legal requirements for obtaining a marriage license.
5. To make sure that the welfare of children has been considered and their rights legally secured, if the bride or groom has children.
6. To be available to assist in any way that may be needed.

### ***Responsibilities of the Committee of Oversight***

To see that the wedding is accomplished with dignity, reverence, and simplicity.

To meet with the persons being married to discuss plans for the wedding, including any proposed changes in the wording of the vows, the choice of persons to read the certificate and to close the meeting.

To see in advance that all legal requirements have been met and that the proper license has been secured; also to see it properly executed and filed by the clerk with the appropriate civil authorities within the specified time.

To arrange for the care of the certificate following the meeting

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for worship and to see that opportunity is given for those present to sign it.

To arrange for recording the certificate, as required by the monthly meeting, and to give the recorder an address to which the certificate is to be returned.

To report to the monthly meeting whether the marriage has been suitably accomplished, whether the legal requirements have been satisfied, whether the certificate has been properly recorded, and to report the married names for recording in the monthly meeting minutes.

To see that the reception, if any, to follow the wedding is appropriate to the character of the occasion which it celebrates.

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<http://neym.org/faith-practice/appendix-2/travel-minutes> [pp. 264-265]

### ***C. Travel Minutes and Letters of Introduction***

The spiritual life of the Society of Friends has long been nourished by visitation outside one's own meeting. Such visitation may be thought of by the visitor as “casual,” or as “concerned.” A casual visit should have some motive of concern with the deepest values of friendship, of fellowship, and the life of the spirit. Whether or not motivated by special mission, the visits of those who come in love and fellowship are likely to enrich those involved, and indeed the life of the Society.

Often Friends have felt a special concern to visit other groups of Friends. A Friend with such a concern, which he or she feels is genuine, will be glad to test its genuineness by presenting it for approval at a session of the monthly meeting. If a visit is planned outside the Yearly Meeting, it should also be presented (in person, if reasonably practicable) for approval by the quarterly meeting and by the Permanent Board.

The meeting gives its endorsement to a project of visitation by providing the traveler with a minute which may be presented to other meetings and Friends. A travel minute should be carefully worded, providing a succinct account of the purpose of the visit and identifying the traveler in places where otherwise he or she would be a stranger. Meetings visited customarily write return minutes or endorsements on the back of the travel minute, to be presented to the issuing meetings of the traveling Friend upon return.

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In recent years some Friends traveling without a special concern or on personal business have often been given letters of introduction to Friends meetings in places where they may visit. Such letters of introduction may be helpful in identifying the visitors when they come among Friends.

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<http://neym.org/faith-practice/part-2/chapter-3/marriage> [pp. 153-156]

### **Marriage**

Marriage, if rightly conceived and faithfully maintained, is one of the most sacred of human relationships. Marriage was honored and blessed by Jesus. It is a true example of divine-human cooperation, perfecting a social structure “for the help and continuance of the human family” and “for the mutual assistance and comfort” of both man and woman that they may be “help-meets to each other in things temporal and spiritual.” Marriage, therefore, “should be entered upon discreetly, soberly and in the fear of the Lord.” It can never be truly accomplished merely by outward forms; rather, it requires the spiritual union of hearts, together with mutual pledges of continued love and loyalty, all under a sense of divine approval.

### ***Never Marry But For Love***

Never marry but for love; but see that thou lovest what is lovely.

He that minds a body and not a soul has not the better part of that relation, and will consequently want the noblest comfort of a married life.

Between a man and his wife nothing ought to rule but love. As love ought to bring them together, so it is the best way to keep them well together.

A husband and wife that love and value one another show their children and servants that they should do so too. Others visibly lose their authority in their families by their contempt of one another; and teach their children to be unnatural by their own example.

Let not enjoyment lessen, but augment affection; it being the basest of passions to like when we have not, what we slight when we possess.

Here it is we ought to search out our pleasure, where the field is

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large and full of variety, and of an enduring nature; sickness, poverty, or disgrace being not able to shake it, because it is not under the moving influences of worldly contingencies.

Nothing can be more entire and without reserve; nothing more zealous, affectionate and sincere; nothing more contented and constant than such a couple, nor no greater temporal felicity than to be one of them.

—William Penn: *A collection of the works*, 3rd ed., 1782, vol. 5, pp. 129-32. “Some fruits of solitude,” printed 1693. Maxims 79, 95, 100, 101, 103, 81, 97, 99.

### ***The Right to Choose***

Single young adults, searching for a satisfying life style, need reassurance that their choices may be, and should be, made to suit their individual needs and not to conform to family expectations or societal pressures. Such pressures may push many into marriages for which they are not ready or not suited. Perhaps more people today have the courage to choose singleness and make a whole life. There have always been beautiful examples of this among Friends, and their lives shine.

—Family Life Subcommittee of New England M. Committee on Ministry and Counsel: *Living with oneself and others*, 1978, p. 37

### ***The Rewards of Unfolding Years***

To become a husband and wife makes each of you responsible no longer for yourselves alone. It demands of each an increase, beyond all you now might think, of patience to bear the enlarged responsibilities, and to bear with the incapacities, the weaknesses, the human failings which you are each aware of in yourself and will discover in the other. For God has created no man or woman even nearly perfect. But we grow in both our virtue and our capacity to love by the testing, against the world and each other, of those weaknesses which by the grace of God we can convert into strengths; and by the finding of those strengths and beauties in each other which we hardly dared suspect were there. But these are the rewards of unfolding years; years, not weeks or months. The glory of a great marriage lies in the surprises which loving support, acceptance, and graceful forgiveness can bring forth.

—R. B. Crowell: “Words at a Quaker wedding,” *Friends journal*, November 1, 1974, pp. 560-61.

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### ***Reverent and Understanding Love***

In looking forward to the lifelong comradeship of marriage, remember that happiness depends upon an understanding and imaginative love on both sides. Seek to be joined in a common discipleship of Jesus Christ, desiring that your union may be owned and blessed by him. Consider together the responsibilities of parenthood. Remember the help which you may draw from older and more experienced people including your parents. Ask God’s guidance continually; and when difficulties arise remind yourselves of the value of prayer, of perseverance, and of a sense of humour. —London Y. M.: General advices, adopted 1964. See *The Friend*, London, vol. 122 (1964), p. 940 (7 August).

### ***The True Enjoyment of Marriage***

*Job Scott writes to Eunice Anthony in 1780, shortly before their marriage:*

Having felt thee abundantly near this evening, I am free to write what revives for thy perusal, hoping it may be useful towards our rightly stepping along through time together. First, dearly beloved, let me tell thee, that however short I may be of strict adherence to the Light of Life; yet it is my crown, my chief joy, to feel the holy harmonious influences and inshinings of the love of Jesus my Savior upon my soul; and I feel that without this I must be miserable indeed. I also believe that the true enjoyment of the marriage union consists eminently in both being engaged to draw near to the Lord, and act in his counsel; which I not only wish but in a good degree expect, may be our happy case. If it should, though we have as it were a dry morsel to partake of, as to the things of this life; yet we may joy in the Lord, and rejoice in the God of our salvation. Thou knowest I have no great things to invite thee to.... May we, the remainder of our lives, earnestly press after resignation to the Lord’s will, and above all things, strive to please him who only can give peace, in whatever circumstances we may be. Then, I trust, the guardian angel of his holy presence will encamp around us, and his everlasting arms be underneath to support.

—Job Scott: *Journal*, 1797, pp. 74-5.

### ***A Wealth of Tacit Commitment***

I have casually referred to my second marriage in 1902, as

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though it were merely one event among the many events which came in succession. But it was very far from an “ordinary” happening. Every aspect of my life was touched and transformed by that initiation into a new and sacred fellowship. We promised in simple Quaker marriage custom to be “faithful and loving,” but we little knew what a wealth of tacit commitments lay hidden under those three explicit words of promise. How little of life, especially of married life, can be pattern-stamped and groomed into line by explicit agreements in advance. Every crisis of life brings situations which could not be anticipated or planned for beforehand, and for which there could be no contractual arrangements. Every occasion of our lives has brought into play the unformulated and tacit commitments which only love can supply.

—Rufus M. Jones: *The trail of life in the middle years*, 1934, pp. 86-7

### ***Seek Timely Advice***

We would counsel Friends to take timely advice in periods of difficulty. The early sharing of problems with sympathetic Friends or marriage counsellors can often bring release from misunderstandings and give positive help towards new joy together. Friends ought to be able to do this, but much will depend on the quality of our life together in the Society. If marriages among us fail, we are all part of that failure. We need to be more sensitive to each other’s needs, knowing one another in the things which are material as in the things which are eternal.

—Report of Marriage and Parenthood Committee. London Y. M. *Proceedings*, 1956, p. 102.

### ***Demonstrate All We Stand For***

Do we not have, in marriage, a powerful opportunity to demonstrate in one nuclear human relationship all we stand for, and all we seek to proclaim to the wider world?

—David R. Mace: *Marriage as vocation*, 1969, p. 3.

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