

Settling in Worship

I am holding two images: walking in fall by a pond filled with ducks and geese. A couple of ducks get spooked by our presence and fly up, quacking, and most of the geese fly honking into the sky, not to return and settle any time soon. Another walk by a pond: This time there is some nervous quacking and honking, but the ducks and geese stay settled on the still waters, refusing to be disturbed.

What makes the difference? In meeting, what enables us to hold to the stillness, to stay settled? What deepens us to vocal ministry? What helps us turn toward the center? What enables us to gather? What does it feel like when we refuse to be disturbed?

We can explore these questions as individual seekers, but also as members of a seeking community. Our individual answers will be as varied as our spiritual practices, but start from that same point. In our daily life what disciplines do we observe that enable us to be present to the Spirit, to return to center again and again? Do we come to meeting for worship full of the fruits of a week of such practice, or do we come famished for the centering that we have not found through the week? What has our experience been? What would we like it to be? Have we experienced difficulties, and if so, what can we learn from that experience to take into the next day, the next week? Have we asked for assistance?

When we come together in meeting for worship, we bring our individual experiences and needs. And as we settle into silent worship, we inevitably begin with our selves. I struggle to turn off constant internal conversations, to still myself. At a recent retreat for extended worship, I asked within for assistance, knowing that to spend many hours in conversation with my self would not be fruitful. I was given the understanding that I needed to practice being present to the others in the circle.

What a gift! I was reminded how intertwined my life is with these dear friends, I saw the many ways in which I have grown deeper because of them, I was led to know how through them I am connected to the world in larger and larger circles.

We are made for connection. When I stay within my own self, whether through fear or loneliness; through belief in my own strength or in the correctness of my beliefs; whether in haste because I have been surprised or I feel a decision must be made at once—when I stay within I am not able to connect to Truth in the way I do through my connection to others. I am whole when I am connected; when seeking, we come to Truth together.

When we come together in a gathered meeting for worship, we start out in our individual selves, but in worship, we connect with each other and through each other to something deeper. We can assist that connection by coming prepared to

meeting for worship, and by spiritual disciplines that focus us toward each other, toward the community: by holding one another in the Light; by asking Spirit how we may be of assistance to another; by asking for a clearer understanding of some aspect of our life in community.

At a meeting retreat last March, we shared with one another our experiences in trying to maintain an individual spiritual discipline for at least 20 minutes a day. We practiced holding one another in the Light, and described to each other what that felt like, to give and to receive. We practiced gently speaking to one another the truth of our experience of the other's vocal ministry. During the retreat, when we were trying a small experiment in extended worship, one Friend felt moved by the Spirit to express her sense of our unity by holding hands. While the gesture was understood as the sign of close of worship, it became clear that we were not ready to rise. Friends resisted moving out of that gathered space. The worship continued. Was the Friend misled in sharing her nonverbal message? I don't believe so. I believe her message gave us the gift of tangibly experiencing how deep we had gone together in a way that a spoken message might not have done, the gift of knowing that we wanted to stay in that settled worship.

When in meeting for worship we as individuals turn from seeking within to seeking together, we go into that deep space from which authentic ministry rises. We are enabled to gather, to be still together, and we cannot be disturbed. We float on still waters, at home.

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