

NYYM Bible Study

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Conflict, Shadow and Unity

Shadow and Light

Genesis 2:18-3:22

As Quakers, we talk a lot about the Light. We might not always agree on what this means, but we are generally clear that we live in the Light, or at least seek to. We seek the Light in the world and in the people of this world. One early name for Quakers was Children of the Light.

What we don't talk about so much, at least in my experience, is the dark; the shadow. Or, often, the conflict among us, in a way that we seek to learn what it has to teach us. Yet there is no light without shadow; and, it seems, no unity without conflict. That is what we will explore a bit in the Bible study this week – shadow, conflict, and unity; and how Spirit is present in all, and uses all.

Before we begin today, I want to talk about language. We all have a spiritual language, words that for us give voice to our experience and understanding of the Divine. I want everyone to feel comfortable using your spiritual language. It is important that you use language that is meaningful for you. And for all of us to listen with open hearts to the words and to what they represent, what they point to. My hope is that we will speak and listen with generous hearts open to each other.

I also want to say a bit about what I mean by conflict, shadow and unity.

First, conflict.

Conflict is inevitable. We are a diverse people and we will disagree with each other from time to time – especially as we try to discern and decide together, as a community, things that are important to us. Sometimes we will disagree a lot, sometimes infrequently. Conflict shows us where our differences lie. It shows us who we are, as individuals and as a community. It can show us what we aspire to. So, not only is conflict inevitable, it can be good – a fertile place of discernment and growth. We can welcome it as a gift when it shows up.

Then there is unity. It seems to me that there is no unity without conflict. Not that I *like* that – it just is what seems to be true – that unity grows from conflict. But maybe more than that, it integrates conflict – a concept that I am still trying to understand. But, many of us have experienced that integration in our meetings for business, where we learn experientially that unity and conflict are intertwined. One way that is manifest: we can have unity in the Spirit even when there is disagreement, when we don't all agree – and it is powerful. The disagreement, discord and diversity feed our unity, and strengthen it. (Honestly, even though I have experienced this – I *still* have a hard time really believing it! Or, understanding it.)

And now, shadow.

I have been doing some of my own inner work around shadow, and there is a lot that I don't understand. It's very unclear to me – very, well, *shadowy!* Yet, it felt right to bring the shadow into our time together this week. Based on my own work and doing a little reading about it, here is what I think the shadow is. It's the part of us that we want to keep hidden. The part of us that we don't want others to know about. The part that *we* don't even want to know about ourselves. I would just like to surgically remove the part of me that desperately craves approval from other people. That craves *your* approval of me right now! I don't really want to own that. I would like to keep that part of me stowed away in a lockbox.

We each have shadow parts of ourselves, and we also have communal shadows. I hope you will be open to exploring the shadow within us – individually and communally – as we seek insight from the Bible stories this week. The concept of shadow is not just about psychology. It is deep spiritual work. God works our transformation, individually and communally, in the shadows.

We will be talking more about this as the week goes on. For now, let's turn to our first Bible story.

Read:

Genesis 2:18-3:22

So this is one of the foundational stories of our faith. It's a story of our relationship with God, and also a story that begins to reveal how we are in relationship with each other.

Where do you see conflict in this story?

Okay, now we turn to the shadow, where it gets a little more complicated, at least for me. What are the shadow pieces? What are the parts that Eve and Adam want to hide from God? And from themselves?

What role do the shadow parts play?

Where is there unity in this story?