

When we have once entered into that experience of communion, we realize that we did not create it through our action of worship; all we did was to enter a reality which has always been there from the beginning of time, waiting for us to join it, for "In the beginning was the word . . ." It is always here within us and beside us, available to us as an invisible stream into which we can step at any time.

William Taber, *Four Doors to Meeting for Worship* (1992)

Suggested Readings

Brinton, Howard. *Friends for 350 Years*, 2002. Chapters 4 & 5.

Loring, Patricia. *Listening Spirituality*, vol 2, 1999. Chapter 1.

New York Yearly Meeting. *Faith and Practice*, 1998. Pages 7-19.

Pym, Jim. *Listening to the Light*, 1999. Pages 39-63.

Smith, Robert Lawrence. *A Quaker Book of Wisdom*, 1998. Chapters 1 & 2.

Steere, Douglas. *Friends and Worship* (FGC pamphlet).

Suggested readings available from:

QUAKERBOOKS OF FGC

Friends General Conference
1216 Arch Street, 2B
Philadelphia, PA 19107
1-800-966-4556
www.quakerbooks.org

For information about Quaker meetings in the pastoral or programmed tradition, please contact the New York Yearly Meeting office. See also New York Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice.

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This pamphlet was drafted by the Coordinating Committee for Ministry and Counsel and the Advancement Committee of New York Yearly Meeting.

An Introduction to Quaker Meeting for Worship in the Unprogrammed Tradition



Meeting for Worship

The Religious Society of Friends (also called Quakers) believes that there is that of the Divine in everyone. It is to that Living Presence that we strive to respond and to speak. Friends also believe that all human beings yearn for communion with their creator. It is our experience that God is present among us to teach us directly. The Quaker way of worship originates in these beliefs.

Meeting for worship is at the center of Quaker life. Because we rely on direct experience of the Divine, our meetings have neither a pastor nor a program. We gather to worship in expectant silence, centering on God – the Divine Presence, the Spirit, the Seed, the Christ Within, the Inward Light – and by this we are nourished and led.

Quaker silence is not an emptiness crying out to be filled, but a contemplative openness to the Spirit of God. In silence Friends seek a stillness within, a quieting of the busy mind and internal monologue. This allows awareness of God to cover us, as individuals and as a group, and there our worship begins.

Even for seasoned Friends silent worship is not always an easy process. It requires practice. Do not be concerned that a sense of God or covering Spirit is not immediate. Be patient with yourself and unconcerned with outside distractions. Those who wait in the Light with open hearts are in the presence of God.

... when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up ...

Robert Barclay
Apology (1676)

Understandings

- ❖ Worship begins when the first person enters the room and sits down quietly. The meeting will center by settling into a deep and seeking silence as we wait upon God.
- ❖ Please be prompt; everyone's presence enriches the worship. If you should arrive late, however, and a message is being given, please wait until it is finished before you enter.
- ❖ Out of the silence any worshiper may be led to speak, sharing vocal ministry or vocal prayer. Because the silence is our way of listening for God, breaking the expectant hush of meeting for worship is not done lightly. Relying on the Divine Presence to lead us, Friends traditionally do not bring prepared messages. When a message rises to consciousness, we patiently examine it, testing that it is from God's Spirit and not from our own will and ego. Then we try to discern whether God intends the message to be spoken aloud. Sometimes the entire meeting for worship passes in silence.
- ❖ Vocal ministry may be inspired by an earlier message, but it should not be in

direct response, critical or contentious. A Quaker meeting for worship is not a forum or a place for debate. "The most satisfactory ministry in our meetings arises when we speak with discipline about an insight we find when we wait silently upon the Lord." New York Yearly Meeting, *Faith and Practice*.

- ❖ A substantial period of silence follows each message so that listeners can absorb the ministry into their worship.
- ❖ Brevity and simplicity are appreciated, and are often most effective. It is the custom that a worshiper will offer only one message during meeting for worship. In many meetings Friends are encouraged to stand to speak. Please remember that some do not hear as well as others.
- ❖ Thoughtful listening in meeting for worship is as important as vocal ministry. Try to listen to all messages tenderly and with openness. The guidance of God may be received through anyone in any condition of life. A listening heart may find truth within a message even when the speaker's manner or vocabulary seem unfamiliar.
- ❖ It is the custom to close meeting for worship with a handshake and greetings.

When I feel drawn to share something in the quiet meeting for worship, I simply rise and say it as briefly as I know how, seeking ever to 'keep close to the root,' and to avoid all vain and distracting ornamentation.

Douglas Steere, *A Quaker Meeting for Worship* (1941)