

The Quaker Way



Quakers sit in silence because they want to know something that words cannot tell them. They want to feel something or become aware of something that they can really make connection with. It is something fundamental to their life, they know that, indeed it is the underlying reality of their life, but they are not normally aware of it.

They are preoccupied with other things. They are taken up, like others, with the relatively shallow things of life, encouraged by the media and contemporary culture generally, and they hardly feel the depth of it all. So they feel the loss, the distance, and want somehow to get close to this deeper reality.

They want to become "the Friends of Truth," as they liked to call themselves at the beginning. Not any truth, but a truth that relates specifically to their deepest felt needs, and to the needs of the world. They are looking for a truth by which to live, that is, a sense of reality that tells them who they are and how they should live.

Part of the reality of their life, of course, is their relationship with one another and with other people, both near and far. So they want to "discern" what happens between people, what makes for a good life together, and what makes for a bad one.

They want to learn in their own experience how relationships that are broken can be mended, how conflicts can be resolved, and how "the Friends of Truth" can work together to make these things happen in the world....

Like many other people, they experience life as disconnected, broken, at odds. They feel basically dissatisfied with life as it is generally lived, unhappy with themselves. But they know intuitively that it doesn't have to be like this, that there is an underlying unity and meaning in life, if only they could find it.

They don't want to give in to the pessimism that says this is all it ever can be, yet on the other hand they can't accept the optimism that pretends that life is other than it is. They want the truth about life.

Risky as it may be, they want to find out how things really are, because they sense, they hope, that the truth will give meaning to their lives and make them whole.

But what is meant by truth here? It doesn't seem to mean what we normally mean by it.