

The Quaker Way, Chapter 4: Making Decisions **“What makes all this possible?” (pp.78-80)**

What makes the Quaker way of decision an issue practicable, then, is that:

We pause between contributions,

not jumping in as soon as we get a chance, and not interrupting.

We speak to the meeting as a whole,

not to an individual in particular, especially not to the Friend who has just spoken.

We defer to the clerk.

Like the players in an orchestra, we wait till we have a cue from the 'conductor' that we are free to speak. In a large meeting this normally involves standing up or raising a hand and waiting to be called.

In a small meeting a look or a nod may be enough.

These three could be summed up by the advice of George Fox, 'Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts'.

We listen attentively to everyone,

even the least articulate or knowledgeable.

We speak briefly and to the point,

avoiding the desire to make a speech.

We avoid rhetoric and manipulation,

which may persuade people temporarily, but not convince them deeply.

We may prepare our minds beforehand, but not our opinions!

The clerk has to bear that in mind too, since anxiety about an item on the agenda may persuade her to settle her own mind about it first.

These four can be summed up by Fox's words again: 'Let truth be the head, and practise it'.

We keep silent while the clerk writes a Minute.

The temptation is to chatter while the clerk scribbles quietly at the table, but she is trying to get 'the sense of the meeting', so she needs our quiet support.

We unite on a Minute, not on a vote.

We're looking to agree, not on the proposal that carries the day, but the form of words which expresses the sense of the whole meeting.

We delay till another meeting if unity is not achievable.

Even if only one member cannot accept the Minute, it will be better for the meeting, and the decision, if we wait until we can all accept it - whatever it then is.

We submit to the Minute once it is accepted,

which is a test of how seriously we take the process of being led by the Spirit.

These last four may be summed up briefly by Fox's 'Mind the oneness'.

These are not rules, in the strict sense. They are models of good practice. There are no sanctions against not following them, but our experience has been, historically, that if we do not follow the practice we shall miss out on the clarity and confidence that come with it.

But Friends find that out for themselves. It is part of the experimental nature of our faith that we test our practice continually by experience, if only to confirm, sometimes, that we got it right the first time.

Once we are (re)assured of this, we can commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the discipline, and hold on in faith when the process seems to be stuck or dragging on endlessly. Nothing is more heartening than to see it come right in the end.