

Session 3 Outline – June 24, 2018

Reconnecting

1. Continuity and grounding: Session 2 was on May 6th, seven weeks prior to June 24th. I'm reviewing here what we might want carry forward in our thoughts and memories, in order to give Session 3 continuity and ground it in what has gone before.

2. Let's start with individual check-ins: Give these questions some thought, but don't feel you need to answer each.

- How have you been the past two months? Interesting experiences to share?
- Comments on the experiment of "going into the silence." We will discuss this more later in today's session.
- Hovering questions, uncertainties, etc.?

3. Scientific versus personal truth, and the paradox of the Quaker way

- *Scientific truth* – objective, provable, facts, capable of collective, consensual affirmation
- *Personal truth* – direct, intimate, about ourselves, our experience of life, our relationship with others, and our spirituality

In fact, though, Quakers seek a way toward consensual and collective sharing and affirmation of "personal truth" as well. The Quaker way embraces a paradox.

- Quakers affirm that each person is unique and experiences *personal truth* in a unique way.
- Quakers also affirm that *all beings have the same truth* planted within them as "the seed," "the light," "that of God," "the Christ within."

4. Outer versus inner authority: People struggle with the discrepancy between what outer authorities tell them is true and their inner sense that something else is what they are really experiencing.

- Quakerism arose in the 17th century in a time of major religious ferment, when there was growing distrust of the Authority of State and Church, and much religious and political turmoil. The Church/State wasn't meeting the needs of the people.
- *Those who were disillusioned with the teaching of their time could recognize that they must have had some rudimentary knowledge of what they were looking at for otherwise they wouldn't have realized that the official teaching had missed it or muffled it. Something in their experience enabled them to see what was right and appropriate.* – Ambler (17)
- Modern seekers also experience this challenge.

I listened to the stories from the Bible as read and interpreted by my teachers and the pastor and knew that there was a kernel of the truth, but the real truth, the underlying truth of the story that I needed to have confirmed for me, was never spoken. The Bible as written and selected by the church for reading by the masses did not contain the truth that I longed to find. I had no idea what it was that I needed to find, but I knew instinctively that I would not find it in organized religion.

– Linda M. Moore, *Memories of Magdalene* (2009)

- As Fox and others found, external authority does not satisfy our inward sense of the real. The gift of the Quaker way is affirmation of personal authority from within.
- However, it is important for us to see that *we have all struggled and still struggle with this personal-versus-external authority conflict*. From birth we are socialized to obey external authority. Growing up we internalize the need to present ourselves to the world as being "orthodox." As we grow into adulthood and begin to trust our inner sense of truth, we still run up against this childhood training. It carries a lot of weight, even a lot of threat.

4. Fox's awakening

- “[George Fox] wanted desperately to find the reality he could trust to give him a sense of who he was and what he was to do” (19). For a long time he struggled, suffered extreme depression, spent time alone, went back to the Bible over and over. Then, in 1647, he had the spiritual experience which we recognize as the turning point in his life, related in his *Journal*:

But as I had forsaken all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people, for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition.

And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then. Oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition', and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.

Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre- eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power. Thus, when God doth work who shall let [prevent] it?

And this I knew experimentally.

- Fox continued to experience intermittent depression. He wasn't magically transformed. But now he knew that there was something else, that “he was upheld by the Spirit” because he had experienced it.
- With *practice* entering the silence, the spirit, the divine, the Christ within, the light, whatever we call it showed him more. It enlightened him. He had "openings." He grew in the Spirit. It was a *process* for Fox and early Quakers, and it continues to be a process for us today.

5. Silent waiting

Fox urged people to give up their reliance on books and the people who tried to interpret them and to turn instead to a source of insight and understanding inside them.

It meant giving up thought and imagination for at least this special time of meditation, for these too were governed by words and images and would inevitably distract from the direct experience they needed.

Fox discovered that by quieting the mind and feelings, and entering into the silence, he could experience this deeper awareness. He closed his eyes and waited for the truth and a light would show up. (21)

6. Experiment with silent waiting

- During Session 2 we did not try the experiment. Amanda shared the trouble and pain she experiences with "waiting silence," describing the Southern Baptist teaching that "heretical" leadings are "from Satan." We spent time talking about this sort of personal challenge.
- Mike shared his example: the experience of needing to come out as gay while in Lutheran seminary in the 1970s. The heart of the challenge for him was that he was profoundly convinced of his Christian faith, yet he also had a profound certainty within that God did *not* condemn his homosexuality.

7. How ego interferes with our inner awareness

- Silent waiting isn't easy, and something other than experiencing the light often gets in the way. Early Friends called this *self-will*, the tendency of the self to assert itself. Today we would probably call it the *ego*.

- Ego is our self as we think of our self, our sense of identity. Who we think we are, who we present to the world. For our purpose the key is to recognize when our ego is interfering with our awareness, and this recognition is a process.
- Quaker answer is different from that of traditions which talk about suppressing or getting rid of self-will. That answer derives from the discovery of what happens in silent waiting.
- *The self was indeed stubborn, but its assertiveness was due to a profound misunderstanding. The self thinks it is alone and needs to fight its corner. But this is an illusion created by anxiety. The self, that is the true self, is in fact connected with others, and indeed with the whole creation and its mysterious origins with God. But it cannot see this because it has identified with an image, an idea. (26)*
- It is the idea of ourselves which keeps us separate.
- The practice of silent waiting remains the core of the Quaker way because it lets us see beyond the limits of words. As we become silent and wordless, even in our thoughts, two things happen: the assertive self begins to subside, and "another kind of awareness will arise, quite different from our normal wordy ideas." (22)
- *It is possible to go on this journey only when there is the light which comes through the understanding of yourself, and that light cannot be given to you by another; No Master, no guru can give it to you, now will you find it in the Gita or any other book. You have to find that light within yourself and this inquiry is hard work. No one can lead you, no one can teach you how to inquire into yourself. One can point out such inquiry is essential, but the actual process of inquiring must begin with your own self-observation.*

– Jiddu Krishnamurti,

Bombay, 4th Public Talk, February 20, 1957

<http://jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/1957/1957-02-20-jiddu-krishnamurti-4th-public-talk>

BREAK

Moving forward – Elaine

To continue with Fox's experience. Ambler points to something very deep about the process and the spiritual experience of Fox and the Early Quakers, which may or may not be common among Friends today. Earlier, in the introduction, he mentioned that his talks, which this book is based on, may be a help for Friends who want to go deeper.

What did the Light show him? Following the narrative of Ambler, which is by no means comprehensive of Fox's experiences, or experiences of the Light.

Again, this is Fox's experience, your experience may be in a different context. And from his journals, it happened later that year. (a process)

He, Fox, sees All appeared that is out of the light.

*But Oh, then did I see my troubles, trials and temptations more than I had ever done! As the light appeared, all appeared that is out of the light, darkness, death, temptation, the unrighteous, the ungodly; all was manifest and seen in the light. And then the spiritual discerning come into me by which I did discern my own thoughts, groans and sighs, **and what it was that did veil me, and what it was that did open me.***

** It is not all darkness and death. There is also the light which enables him to see the darkness and death. So there is something in him which is uncontaminated by the blight on human affairs and which is free from the pressures of self-interest and pretense.

It is concerned with truth

One deep, divine resource which would give him all the insight. 'faith, grace and power' he needed.

Something he could take action on, himself.

There was a sense of freedom. There is a sense of not being condemned but being accepted.

The light would show him many other things later as and when he was able to receive these new insights but none of this would be possible until he had seen the truth about himself and done something about it. (becoming aware of what was interfering with the light.)

Quotes from Ambler:

Humans cannot of course see the truth about themselves, or about anything else so long as they are committed to a false image or theory. P27 It is limiting.

If they drop their mask however, they will see everything differently, including themselves....Moreover, they will see their pretentious egos as they are. (and it is a process)

Self-Knowledge – (Know thyself) They found that when they sat in silence and slowed down the thinking process of their minds, the self began to subside. It was less anxious and assertive but more than that, an awareness rose within them which seemed to come from outside them, not because it was strange or other-worldly, but because it let them see the whole of their life. P28

When he was still and silent, he was more able to hear something deep with him, because he own thoughts and fancies would have quieted down.

*Fox discovered that one can make contact with the deep reality of one's life and it is responsive to one's needs and the needs of the world.

**He discovered that he could guide others to the experience of the light.

Aside - There were many who were convinced but not all. When I read Fox's Journal, it seemed to me he spent as much time being beaten up, thrown into jail and run out of town as he was guiding people to a spiritual experience.

Inner Light

Early Friends (to solve the problem of words explaining vibrant spiritual experiences) went a long way toward solving this problem - insofar as it is possible to solve it at all – by using a multitude of terms and phrases when speaking or writing of their spiritual experiences. Many have biblical roots (understandably).

So Friends could communicate:

The Word of Life, the Seed, Truth in the Heart, eternal Spirit of God, the inward light, spirit, grace, the light of Jesus, that of God in everyone, and many more.

One of the most basic – Light Handout 3.

Biblical References

Characteristics of the Light

Queries:

1. How do you see the light working in your life?
2. Have we become thieves ourselves? Have we substituted our concept of the Light instead of our experience of the Light?

Discussion & Homework