

## Session 4 Outline – July 15, 2018

### 1. Check-ins

- Greet and (re)introduce (new) group members and those who missed Session 3
- Review *Group Agreement*

non-judgmental	empathy & patience	active listening to understand
no argument	confidentiality	safe to share when uncomfortable
mutual respect	the right to pass	with something
civility	I-language	
tolerance	clarity	
- Open-ended questions
  - How have you been since we saw you last? Interesting experiences to share?
  - Comments on the experiment of "going into the silence."
  - Hovering questions, uncertainties, etc.?

### 2. Quick review of Session 3 insights (unnumbered handout)

- *About the series so far*
  - Do-it-yourself nature of Quakerism's roots among the farm communities of 17th century northwestern England
  - Focus on experience rather than on authority figures.
  - Ambler describes Quakerism "for the rest of us."
  - Challenge of engaging mind in the inward process and communicating the experience to others.
  - Tension in between the desire to center down and compelling need to take action on concerns.
  - Key question for each of us: "How is the Light making changes in me?"
  - We all need healthy egos, but ego wants to be "the whole show." How to help ego feel safe enough to step aside?
  - Jiddu Krishnamurti: "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."
- *About what happens in the silence*
  - Energies and objects of attention moving around in a kaleidoscope. At some point they all fall together into a mysteriously coherent pattern that one can contemplate.
  - Noticing how rare silence is in our daily lives. Becoming able to get below things that happen to reach deeper truths, what's really important.
  - Thoughts always running, and silent worship makes us very aware of this. Practice not attaching to them, just seeing and acknowledging them. Just being present and observing. That's when we can feel leadings.
  - Entering silent worship the mind has fireworks. Practice focusing on a Bible passage. Attention wanders, and each time it comes back the words take on new meaning. Sometimes something in this process hooks something else one has been dealing with. One may become silent...like being in a blank space. Left with something to chew on later, with answers coming out of the blue.
- *About Handout 3.1 – "The Light Within"*
  - We tend to focus on how we are each different and have unique experiences of the light with. *But how are our experiences similar?*
  - We took turns reading the listed characteristics of the Light from the list, adding comments: divine, single, unifying, universal, eternal, pure, unchanging, personal, inward, saving, guiding, resistible, persistent, empowering, ineffable.

### 3. Handout 4.1 – The "God-shaped hole"

- Have someone read handout aloud & ask for comments
  - What "God" means today
  - What might this reality be?
  - Advice from Samuel Fisher (1660)
  - Not tying the experience of "God" down to words
    - Anthony Benezet (18<sup>th</sup> c.)
    - William Penn (17<sup>th</sup> c.)
- Queries (**review worship sharing process, if necessary**)
  - What are some of the ways you talk to yourself about your personal experience of "the God-shaped hole" and what you feel fills it?
  - How do you talk to others about these matters?
  - What gaps, differences, discomforts, and so on do you experience in trying to describe your personal experience to others?
- Follow-up Discussion

#### **Break**

### 5. "Cheap grace"

- Experiencing the Light does not immediately bring us to an experience of God. This important to acknowledge.

Modern folks coming to Quakerism tend to bring along the pre-packaged "self-help" mythologies we learn from our culture. We tell ourselves—whether we know we do or not—"If I just come to meeting and sit in silence, I will experience God directly."

- This is what the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace."

Opening, healing, and growing don't actually work this way, so Friends can get very disappointed and discouraged.

Opening, healing, and growing depend on an on-going two-way process of engagement with our inward awareness, on letting the Light show us, bit by bit, how ego concerns block our inner awareness. This calls for waiting without words, which is why Quakers sometimes use the term "waiting worship."

### 6. What happens next?

- When we do let ourselves wait, new awareness comes.

*When we do begin to get sense of God we realize that it is **quite different** from what our previous idea of God might have led us to expect. This kind of reality **will not fit into our ready-made concepts.** (37)*

*Follow the advice we are already being given in our conscience.... Explore the possibilities of our own present experience of life, including our negative experiences of anxiety, guilt and uncertainty. ... [If] we venture on the path we will discover the huge positive of awareness and faith. (40)*

- We also become able to talk with our fellows about what we are learning.

*Would it help to evoke that experience if we were to try and describe it? Possibly. There is a risk that any such description might be taken as a belief, an idea that could be detached from the experience and regarded as true in itself. It would then defeat its purpose.*

*But if it is taken as an expression or interpretation of the experience, it could indeed be helpful. We Quakers have a word for such talk, as we shall see later on. It is "testimony." Our talk about God and other mysteries of life has the character of "testifying" to our experience of these things. (40)*

## 7. Handout 4.2 – What now?

- How, then, do we go about testifying—that is, sharing our inward experience of this mystery that people traditionally call "God"?
- Have someone read handout aloud & ask for comments
  - Letting go of beliefs
  - Reality is finally a mystery
  - "Knowing" instead of "believing"
- Queries
  - What are some "poetical" ways you might describe what you already trust about reality?
  - What helps you to feel and accept this trustworthiness?
  - How do you share your inward confidence in your daily life—whether or not you tell anyone where it comes from?
- Follow-up Discussion

## 8. Wrap-up & homework

- Continue the experiment of brief daily sitting in silence
- Read Chapter 3 – "Meeting others"
- Observe your experience between now and next session in terms of this query:

*What do we gain when we are able to share our inward sense of reality with others?*

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