

Session 5 Outline: Meeting Others – August 18, 2018

Based on Rex Ambler's *The Quaker Way*, Chapter 3, pp. 49-58

1. Check-ins

- Greet returnees and introduce newcomers, if any
 - How have you been since we saw you last? Interesting experiences to share?
 - Comments on the experiment of "going into the silence"?
 - Hovering questions, insights, etc.?

- Review *Group Agreement*

○ non-judgmental	○ tolerance	○ I-language
○ no argument	○ empathy & patience	○ clarity
○ mutual respect	○ confidentiality	○ active listening to understand
○ civility	○ the right to pass	○ safe to share uncomfortable things

2. Silent waiting (worship) (5-10 minutes)

3. Ready-made concepts vs. testimony

- **Religious and non-religious languages**
 - As a group we are exploring how to speak with and listen to each other regarding our in-most beliefs and experiences.
 - Part of this involves allowing individuals to use their own religious or non-religious terminology, without feeling a need to agree or to disagree with such terms.
 - For example, when writers or group members use the term "God," we can translate inwardly, seeking terms that point for us to whatever we experience as the "ground of our being."

- **Individual practice**
 - *The "Quaker way of looking for God" involves a personal process of transformation. It cannot be otherwise, given the Quaker rejection of external things as the means of finding God. Each person has to find the truth for themselves, and each person is able to do this because they each have something of God in them. (49)*
 - *When we do begin to get a 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)*

- **Sharing with others**
 - We also become able to talk with our fellows about what we are learning. However, we may stumble when we try to describe what we know inwardly.
 - *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.... It is '**testimony**.' Our talk about God and other mysteries of life has the character of '**testifying**' to our experience of these things. (40)*

4. Discussion – What do the terms "testimony" or "testifying" conjure up for you? How might these concepts open us to offering and listening attentively to safe self-disclosures about experience and belief?

5. Individual vs. shared faith & practice

- We've been focusing on how the Quaker way involves a personal process of transformation. However, we can also recognize that the Quaker path involves others.

- Many modern “spiritualities” emphasize the individual almost exclusively, and some say each person has to find the particular truth that suits them. But this is not the Quaker way. Right from the beginning of Quakerism, George Fox and his fellow seekers knew that collective faith and practice is essential, especially the Meeting for Worship.

6. Worship sharing (Review Handout 1.2 – Quaker Queries & Worship Sharing, if necessary)

- Query: What are some benefits you hope to experience by participating in a group such as this one?
- Discussion (*Handout 5.1 – Benefits of sharing with one another*)

7 Holding together

- **Reconciliation**: Nonetheless, finding and maintaining such unity is not easy for a group. Fox writes the following (note that he often equates “the word” with “the light” in his writing)”

"This is a word of reconciliation, that reconciled together to God, and gathers the hearts of his together, to live in love and unify one with another, and lets them see how they have been strangers and aliens from the life of God... Abiding inwardly in the light, it will let you see one another and the unity one with another." (55)

- **Gospel order**. *The Quaker...is "gospel order." That is an order or discipline in a community brought about, not by the imposition of rules or correct beliefs, but by the acceptance of each member of the light within. This is what is meant by "the gospel" here, which is not understood as a public message, as with other churches, but as the message each of us hears in our hearts about what is true and right.*

In practice that requires a discipline of waiting in silence until we each become aware of the issue before us, and by sharing our insights can learn what now needs to be done.... (55-56)

- **Conflict in meeting**: *If there is a conflict in the meeting, which is bound to happen from time to time, we try to get to the truth of the matter, without pushing or defending our individual or factional interest...*

When we are still and quiet, we can let go our anxious sense of self and see the needs and interests of others more clearly. And when we all do this, sitting together, we can discern what is objectively right for all of us. That is what early Friends meant by "abiding in the truth".... (56)

- **Anger and hurt**. *If someone is angry or upset in a meeting, for example, the first thing to do is to discover why this is, in an empathetic way, and to deal with the issue as it arises. If others have been hurt or affected by it in any way, they too should be heard, with an open heart, then gradually the truth will emerge and Friends will have the opportunity to see it together and to embrace it.*

That is the way that "reconciliation" can be achieved, as George Fox described it, and that is the way the meeting will rediscover its unity. (56-57)

- **Unity**. *The unity that Friends aim at is, after all, quite natural and easy. It arises from our own, deeper nature, as soon as that is allowed to express itself: When it happens it is like a good, well-functioning family. And Fox proposed just this as a goal for each Meeting:*

"Keep up your meetings for worship.... And do not strive about outward things; but dwell in the love of God, for that will unite you together; and make you kind and gentle one towards another; and to seek one another's good and welfare, and to be helpful one to another; and see that nothing be lacking among you, then all will be well." (57)

- **Social animals**: *So Quaker spiritual practice reflects the fact that humans are social animals, that much of their disorientation and dysfunction arises from conflicts in community, and that in seeking to remedy the human condition we have to begin with ourselves and our human relationships. (58)*

Wrap-up and Homework