

Session 8: November 18, 2018 – Making decisions, Part 2

1. Check-ins

- Greet returnees and introduce newcomers
 - How have you been since we saw you last? Interesting experiences to share?
 - Comments on the experiment of "going into the silence"?
- Review *Group Agreement*
 - non-judgmental
 - no argument
 - mutual respect
 - civility
 - tolerance
 - empathy & patience
 - confidentiality
 - the right to pass
 - I-language
 - clarity
 - active listening to understand
 - safe to share uncomfortable things

2. Waiting Worship – 10 to 15 minutes

3. Revisiting Session 7 – Making decisions, Part 1

A recurring theme involved learning to wait and observe, instead than rushing to find a solution and act. This is the essence of the Quaker decision-making process. The emphasis is on the process rather than the outcome—even if the group knows they must eventually come to a decision. Quakers seek an outcome that includes everyone, even if not everyone agrees to the decision.

We also spoke about how Quaker decision-making deals with dissent. Quakers seek *unity* with a group's decision. This means that everyone present is able to commit to supporting that decision, even despite any personal disagreements with it. Sometimes a Friends will oppose a decision yet feel conscientiously able to "stand aside"; that is, to have her dissent recorded while allowing the group to proceed, and to agree not to obstruct or sabotage the chosen action.

More rarely, a Friend may be led to "stand in the way" of a decision. This act is not the same thing as a veto. Instead, it places a responsibility on both that Friend and the whole meeting to continue "threshing out" the matter, seeking more clarity that will, they hope, lead to unity.

A group member observed that this valuing and recording of dissent recalls the U.S. Supreme Court procedure of including written minority opinions in court rulings. The conversation remains open, even though the court has decided "for now." The same applies to recorded minutes of Quaker minutes; they can always be revisited.

4. Sharing from the "experiment" of the past month

- *Experiment* – During this month, pay added attention to how groups you belong to make decisions?
- *Queries* – What hints of Quaker decision-making arise naturally? How can you to introduce this approach? If you can, how do others react, participate, resist, etc.?

5. What is essential to the practice of Quaker decision-making? (pp72-78)

- *Silence* – Quakers first center down, letting go of everyday concerns, and preparing to keep openness and sensitivity. They allow a "cushion of silence" between each speaker, so that there is time to consider what the last speaker said. If the meeting or even one Friend is "getting heated," the clerk may call for all to share a moment of silence. Any Friend who senses such a challenge may ask the clerk for a moment of silence.
- *Honesty* – This it doesn't just mean "telling the truth." It is a moral and practical commitment to being truthful in what we say. Other Friends need to hear where we really come from, our experience, our expertise, and our personal feelings about the issue.
- *Pursuing the truth* – "The aim of the Meeting is to get beyond our individual and self-centered viewpoints to one we can all see to be valid, i.e., "the truth," "the best possible solution." (74)

- This means listening, not just with “tolerance and patience toward someone with a very different point of view,” but also with a love that seeks to encompass their different way of being in the world.” (75)
- “When we are big enough really to hear one another, a space is created in which new understandings can emerge.” (75)
- From *Quaker Faith and Practice* of Britain Yearly Meeting (4th ed., 1995/2008)

The unity we seek depends on the willingness of us all to seek the truth in each other's utterances; on our being open to persuasion; and in the last resort on a willingness to recognize and accept the sense of the meeting as recorded in the minute, knowing that our dissenting views have been heard and considered...

In a meeting rightly held a new way may be discovered which none present had alone perceived and which transcends the differences of the opinions expressed. This is an experience of creative insight, leading to a sense of the meeting which a clerk is often led in a remarkable way to record. Those who have shared this experience will not doubt its reality and the certainty it brings of the immediate rightness of the way for the meeting to take. (74)

6. What makes this possible? – Handout 5.1

7. What makes it difficult? – “The process of communal enlightenment does sometimes seem to be impossible.” (80)

- Friends are naturally attached to their favored opinions, their own experience of doing, and with doing business in the secular world, where “getting one’s way” is often ranked higher than finding unity for all those involved.
- There is an inward equivalent to this:

I can suppress voices in myself if I want a strong desire or fear in me to be met. This is a quite normal way of dealing with inner conflicts, as we shall see later, but it can also play mischievously in meetings and committees as well as in ourselves. Instead of dealing with the issues truthfully and honestly in a meeting, we dull our sensitivity and project our dark thoughts or desires onto the situation we are discussing, badly misrepresenting it. This is something which also takes discipline and watchfulness to deal with. (81)

8. Discussion

9. Wrap-up, scheduling decisions, and homework

- *Session 9* – December 16, 2018
- *Reading* – Chapter 5, *Living Faithfully*: “Introduction” (82) and “The Quaker way of living” (82-86)
- *Experiment* – Carry the following idea with you this month and simply observe how it plays out in your day-to-day lives:

Friends live their lives, their practical, everyday lives, as they are led by the Spirit within them. (82-83)