

## Session 7: October 21, 2018 – Making decisions, Part 1

Mike, Bettie, Wendy, David, Emily, Mary, Bruce

### 1. Revisiting Session 6 – Worshiping together

*Our practice of coming together once a week to sit in silence makes sense only if we have learned to do that during the week and have got to know the people we sit with in ordinary, everyday interactions. This would have been easier perhaps for the first Friends, since silence was part of their lives anyway, and the people with whom they worshipped would have met in other ways during the week.*

*When they came together on Sunday, or whenever, they would truly ‘meet’ one another, since they knew one another well from their daily contacts, and they would be spiritually ‘trained’ to be open to one another and the experience of corporate worship. (Ambler 57)*

### 2. Discussion: “What might we do to transcend the modern challenge of our separateness during the week?”

During Session 6, Wendy described her practice of carrying meeting for worship with one during the week. We asked her to say more about that, and then each of us shared our own “during the week” practices.

- Spending hours each day in a neighborhood coffeehouse where parents bring their children, the folks are multi-generational, multi-ethnic, and people everything from online jobs to Bible study to games.
- Relearning how to sit with empty time rather than being bored; exploring at the work the discipline of paying attention to conflicts as contrasted with getting caught up in them during busy times.
- Embraced the notion of simplifying early in life; continue to value silent times.
- Whistling old hymn tunes on the worksite (despite the teasing from workmates).
- Working out with a seniors group called “Off Our Rockers; watching the koi pond.
- Discovering that TV is now distracting and enjoying silence more.
- Simplicity is having few distractions.

As the conversation deepened, we shared experiences of suicidal thoughts, keeping the kind words of other in “notebooks of hope,” seeking social life that includes the “permission to be single,” using the teachings of Daniel Siegel to notice negative thoughts and reframe them positively.

### 3. Quaker way of “meeting for worship with a concern for business”

Mike articulated a recurring theme from the discussion: 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.

Some comments from the discussion:

- Though John McCain bombed North Vietnam during the war, when he died recently the North Vietnamese forgave him and placed flowers on a memorial to him. This act is reminiscent of Jesus on the cross saying, “Father, forgive them. They do not know what they do.” When a young man stole and used this group member’s credit card, the speaker gave him the option of enlisting rather than going to prison, so that he might grow up rather than sinking deeper.
- The themes of our previous discussion all feed into the attitude needed for Quaker decision-making.

Discussion turned to 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 Friend 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.

Since several Friends had used the word “spirit,” Mike reminded the group how Ambler defines that term:

*This is what we mean by 'Spirit.' It is not tangible or observable, and it can't be thought about directly, it's so deep and mysterious. But we know it's there because of what it does to us and with us and through us. It enables us to see clearly what is going on—starting with what we ourselves are doing and experiencing—and it enables us to see what we can do about it, perhaps what we have to do....*

*Spirit is not a supernatural force that goes against the grain of our nature. It is not irrational feeling or magical manipulation. It is our own deep nature, so that when we get in touch with it we experience it as something entirely natural. And we experience it first of all as what enlightens us....*

*So spiritual awareness begins with a very down-to-earth thing: we can see what's going on, whereas previously we were deceived or hood-winked, or trying to kid ourselves, or simply fearful and prejudiced. (Ambler 68-69)*

#### 4. The Quaker response to “sufferings”

Several times during the session we returned to a discussion of how Quakers deal with suffering.

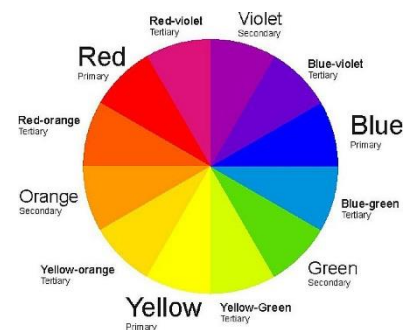
- One Friend shared that the truer goal for Quakers is not the “pursuit of happiness” but the development of the ability to cope with suffering. Quakers pay attention to the suffering of others.
- In fact, early Quakers established “committees for sufferings” in order to pool their resources and support families of dissenters who were forfeited property or were imprisoned or killed.
- Another Friend offered that God doesn’t promise happiness; God promises what is best for us.
- Quakers do not only try to remedy the needs of those who are suffering. We also are intent on addressing the sources of suffering.
- American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has a parable about this Quaker approach: People are on a riverbank, trying to rescue folks who have fallen or been pushed into the river. The Quakers go upstream to find out *why* these folks are falling in or being pushed, and to address the problem at its source.
- Sitting together in waiting worship with concern for a matter does several things Quakers. It gives us enough “spunk” to act, but it also gives us *authority* to act.
- Quakers have done away with the *laity* (the people of a religious faith as distinguished from its clergy), meaning that all Quakers are *ministers*.

#### 5. “Leftover” exercise: A pretend meeting for worship with a concern for business

We did not do this exercise, but we talked about how it might demonstrate aspects of the Quaker decision-making process that we and discussed in this session.

*Assignment:* Our Meeting has determined that we want to paint the tables we are sitting around a color that would make this space for welcoming and comfortable for all of us and for newcomers. Our task is to come to a “sense of the meeting” about which color to choose. We will practice the Quaker decision-making process.

*Reminder:* We are interested in the process of doing this, not in whether or not we reach a decision.



#### 6. Scheduling and homework

- *Next session* – Sunday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 12:30pm, following meeting for worship and potluck
- *Reading* – “What is essential to the practice?” (72-78), “What makes all this possible?” (78-80), “What makes it difficult?” (80-81)
- *Experiment* – During this month, pay added attention to how groups you belong to make decisions? 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.?