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WORSHIP \*\*\*

# An Interpretation of Friends Worship

BY  
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## CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Worship and Love	7
The Basis of Friends Worship and Other Inward Practices	11
What to Do in the Meeting for Worship	20
Questions and Answers	28
For Further Reading	35

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Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed. Minor spelling and typographical errors have been corrected without note.

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## INTRODUCTION

[3]

I WAS not more than ten years old when I first heard mention of the Quakers. The grown-ups of my family were talking among themselves, speaking of an uncle of mine who lived in Philadelphia and operated a pharmacy near the university. I had never seen this uncle and was curious about him, so my ears were open. Presently a reference to the Quakers caught my attention. I wanted to know who the Quakers were. What was told me then I have remembered ever since. The Quakers, I was told, are people who wait for the spirit to move them.

A picture formed in my mind. Many a time I had seen my grandmother sitting quietly, an aura of peace around her as she sewed or crocheted or did her beautiful embroidery work. So I pictured older people, most of them with white hair like my grandparents, all with kindly faces, gathered in silent assembly, heads bent slightly forward, waiting to be moved. It never occurred to me that young people, boys and girls of my age and even younger, might be present and participating.

As the word "spirit" meant nothing definite to me, I could have no idea of just what would move the Quakers, but I had a sense that it would be something within them, perhaps like the stirrings that sometimes moved me, and I may have had a vague notion that this something within them was somehow related to what people called God. I never thought to ask what the Quakers might do after they were moved.

Had I been invited in those days to attend a Friends meeting for worship I would have gladly gone. I would have gone because my picturings had given me good feelings about the Quakers. I would have gone because, young though I was, I liked to be silent now and again. Sometimes my best friend and I would sit quietly together, happy that we were together but not wanting to talk. Sometimes I would go off by myself on walks to look at the wonders of nature, to think my own thoughts, to dream, to feel something stirring in me for which I had no name. Or I might withdraw for a time from the activities of the boys and girls and sit on the porch of our house, my outward eyes watching them at play, my inward eyes turned to an inner life that was as real to me, and sometimes more wonderful than my life with the group.

[4]

Certain experiences I had when alone, certain experiences I had with my young friends, attitudes and feelings that would suddenly arise in me at any time or place—these made up the mainstream of my religious life. Such religion as I had was life-centered, not book-centered, not church-centered. It arose from the well of life within me, and within my friends and parents. It arose from the well of life within nature and the human world. It consisted in my response to flowers, trees, birds, snow, the smell of the earth after a spring rain, sunsets and the starry sky. It consisted in my devotion to pet rabbits and dogs, and to some interest or project that caught my imagination.

I had been taught several formal prayers. One of these I said every night, regularly, before getting into bed. But I am thinking of the unformed prayers that welled up in me whenever I had need of them. I had been read some stories from the Bible and some of the psalms, and from these I had doubtless gained attitudes of reverence. But I am thinking of the worship that spontaneously arose as I beheld the wonders of the world which God created. Young eyes are new eyes, and to new eyes all things are fresh, vivid, original.

It is sometimes asked if children and young people are capable of the religious life. Certainly they are not capable of sustained effort towards an unswerving aim. Certainly they cannot hold themselves to a consistent discipline. They cannot engage in the religious life as a conscious way of living. These abilities come only as we grow up and subject ourselves to training. But, just as certainly, young people do have religious experiences, and these often are more vivid and glowing than those of the elders. That is it—children can glow. They can light up. This capacity to glow is at the very heart of what we are talking about.

[5]

To be sure, people young and old need instruction. We need instruction in the Bible, in poetry, in all literature that contains truth and beauty. We need to be helped to struggle against our faults, to overcome our imperfections. And we need to be curbed on occasion, as the only way in which we may eventually become able to curb ourselves. But it should not be forgotten that all people, especially young people, have poetry in them. And, more than that, according to the faith of the Friends all people have within them something of the very spirit that created the scriptures.

Religious education, it seems to me, is on the wrong track if it assumes that religion is something that must be drilled into people. It is on the right track if it recognizes that the source of religion is within us as a native endowment, and that the function of education is to call this endowment forth, supply it with the nourishment it needs in order to grow, and guide it in ways that promote maturing. People should have reason to be assured that formal religion is not contrary to the springs of innate religious experience and longing, but is in accord with the life and light within, and simply seeks to direct and develop this spiritual life.

Had a Friend approached me in those days with some such understanding and assurance, and had I been able to understand what he said, I would have had still another reason, and this a compelling one, for attending a meeting for worship. And so I would have gone. I'd have sat there with the others, feeling much at home, perhaps feeling I was in a holy place. I'd have sat as quietly as any for the first ten or fifteen minutes. I would not have worshiped in any formal sense, for I had not been taught any form. But I would have practiced my kind of inwardness, thinking my own thoughts as I did when alone, dreaming wonderful dreams, feeling a life stir within me. Had there been a spoken message or two, I would have listened attentively, tried to understand, and honestly responded.

[6]

Presently, however, I would have begun to fidget. Not knowing what I should try to do in a meeting for worship, I would have had nothing to fall back on when my thoughts ran out, no purpose for curbing my increasing restlessness. Through the windows my eyes would have caught sight of the world outdoors, and I'd have wished I were out there having fun with the boys. Time would have dragged. I'd have asked myself, "Will the meeting never end?" And when finally it did end, I'd have been as glad for the ending as I had been for the beginning.

What should we try to do in a meeting for worship? What do we hope to attain through it? Why is silence desirable? What is the main idea behind the Friends manner of worship? It is true that Quakers wait for the spirit to move them. Why wait? Wouldn't it be better just to go ahead? Besides waiting, what more is to be done? Can we not pray and worship when we are alone, or as we go about our daily affairs? Why is it necessary to meet together? What is worship?

These are not questions that you answer once and for all. You continue to think about them and continue to increase your understanding. But it helps us to think if we put our thoughts in order and study the thoughts of others. So I am going to write down some of the thoughts that have come to me. We shall think about worship and the central faith of the Friends, and let the answers come as they may.

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## WORSHIP AND LOVE

[7]

**W**ORSHIP is the action of the spirit. It springs up from our depths, as love does. It is a form of love, and just as desirable, and just as necessary to human life at its fullest and highest. To worship is an innate need of man. It is not imposed upon us from the outside, though the way we sometimes go about it may make it seem an imposition.

Suppose you are hungry. No one has to tell you to eat. No one has to force you to take food. Suppose you are in love. Must you be told to think of the person you are in love with? Must you be forced to yearn for the loved one?

Worship is a hunger of the human soul for God. When it really occurs, it is as compelling as the hunger for food. It is as spontaneous as the love of boy for girl. If we feel it, no one needs tell us we should worship. No one has to try to make us do it. If we do not feel it, or have no desire to feel it, no amount of urging or forcing will do any good. We simply cannot be forced, from the outside, to worship. Only the power within us, the life within, can move us to it.

But others can guide our preliminary efforts. They can help us to prepare to worship. Such preparation, as Rufus Jones has said, is the most important business in the world. Others can provide conditions, such as the Friends meeting for worship, thanks to which the desire to worship may spring up and grow. The meeting for worship came into existence because the early Friends were powerfully moved to worship together and meet the spiritual needs of one another. I use the word *needs*. Their spiritual needs were more dynamic than ours—or theirs—for food and shelter. Neither threats of violence nor active persecution could keep them away from their meetings.

Why is it that some of us would rather go to a movie, or listen to the radio, or see a ball game, or read an exciting book? One reason, it must be acknowledged, is because our meetings today are sometimes dull and unliving. We assemble in our meeting houses, but nothing happens. A related reason is that many of us have not yet awakened spiritually. Our bodies are active. Our minds are alert. But not our spirits. Such awakening, however, will come in due time, if we encourage it, if we do our part to prepare for it, if we live honestly and are true to ourselves, face life with clear eyes, and continue growing.

[8]

The main reason why we do not worship, or do not want to, is that God is not yet sufficiently real to us. He is not as real to us as our human father. His power is not as real to us as the power of man's brain and muscles, as steam power, as electricity. Worship expresses man's relationship to God. How then can we worship if we are not aware of this relationship, if the main party to it is unreal to us?

Some people speak of worshipping things that are not of God. God being unreal to them, their relation to Him being unrecognized, they turn to what is real to them, and engage in various so-called worships: money-worship, hero-worship, ancestor-worship, the worship of material power and machines, the worship of political States and their rulers. These are false worships. God is the sole object of genuine worship—God and His power which He manifests to us as love, light, and wisdom.

All forms of true worship arise from an experience of the *fact* of God, from the realization that God *is*. Men such as George Fox and John Woolman had their first experiences of God early in life. Most of us come to the experience gradually and later on, if at all. What are we to do meanwhile? Most religions offer formal official statements of what they believe God to be. They say what God's nature is, and set forth His attributes. Friends make no such pronouncement; and I, for one, am glad there is none. Man's words about God cannot substitute for a first-hand experience of the living reality. Friends are directed to seek for the reality within themselves. Meanwhile, we are called upon to have faith that God exists and that it is possible for us to meet with Him. We are called upon to prepare ourselves for this supreme experience. We are urged to try to sense God's presence, daily to practice His presence. By such practice, if we persevere, we shall surely come to have a convincing experience.

[9]

Worship is our response to God's reality, a reality which is, to be sure, within men, but which also is the radiant foundation of the entire universe. In trying to worship, we turn ourselves Godwards. We yearn for Him and endeavor to know His will. Our lives are pointed toward Him. If, and as we succeed, we make contact with God, and by this contact He is made real to us. When He becomes real to us we spontaneously love Him.

Can we see a sunset without responding to its beauty? Can we witness those we love, in their goodness to us, without being touched and moved? Can we hear the voice of our best friend on the phone without eagerly listening and eagerly replying? Be sure, then, that when we come into God's presence we will be touched and moved beyond our greatest expectation.

Nothing so deters us from wanting to worship as the notion that worship is unliving. If it is unliving it is not worship. If it seems dull, tedious or difficult, it is because we are not truly worshiping. We are, perhaps, preparing ourselves to worship. There are difficulties to be overcome in the preparatory stages. Or, we are but assuming the appearance of worship, there being no life, no yearning within, we being more dead than alive inside. Indeed it is dull and tedious to hold the posture, if it is not backed up by a quickening life of the spirit.

True worship is a living experience. By and through it we enter into a life so vital, so vivid, so large and glorious that, by comparison, our life of ordinary activities seems narrow, dull, dead. By bodily action the body comes alive. By mental action the mind comes alive. So by spiritual action the spirit comes alive. Worship is spiritual action. By means of it our spirits awake, mature, and grow up to God.

[10]

All human beings, except those who have been badly damaged by man's inhumanity to man, are moved to love. Some love animals, some flowers. Others love the sea or farm lands or mountains. Some love truth, some love beauty. All of us want and need to love and to be loved by our families and friends, and we would be happy were we able to love all people everywhere. To love and be loved is a universal human urge. Is it any wonder, then, that we are moved to seek God's love? It is inevitable that we should desire this supreme form of love. The First Commandment expresses our innermost desire as well as God's will.

There is nothing incredible about our wanting to love and to be loved by God. The incredible fact is that it can actually happen, does happen. Some day we will experience it. Then our doubts will end. Then we will worship God through love of Him.

Here is what two religious men of advanced spiritual development had to say of their experiences. George Fox wrote, "The word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'My love was always to thee, and thou art in my love.' And I was ravished with the sense of the love of God." Brother Lawrence wrote, "You must know that the benevolent and caressing light of God's countenance kindles insensibly within the soul, which ardently embraces it, a divine and consuming flame of love, so rapturous that one puts curbs upon the outward expression of it."

It is to this divine love that we are called. This is the high promise of man's life. We are called away from indifference, from meanness, malice, prejudice and hate. We are called above the earthly loves that come and go, and are unsure. We are called into the deep enduring love of God and man and all creation. Worship is a door into that love. Once we have entered it, our every act is a prayer, our whole life a continuous worship.

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## THE BASIS OF FRIENDS WORSHIP AND OTHER INWARD PRACTICES

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**S**OME people believe that whereas God's nature is divine, man's nature is depraved. God is good, but men are evil. God, according to this view, exists in heaven, remote from us. We exist in sin, remote from Him, in hell or next door to it. Human beings are completely separated from the Divine Being. The only possible connection between men and God is that brought about by the mediation of the church and its authorized officials. Friends have never held this view.

Friends, beginning with George Fox, realized that something of God dwells *within* each and every human being, and that, therefore, He is reachable by us through direct contact, and we are within His reach, subject to His immediate influence. This is the well-known basis of Friends worship.

Since God is within us, Friends turn inward to find Him. This is not a matter of choice or

inclination; it is a matter of necessity. Turning inward, we turn away from all externals. Friends practice inwardness. Rufus Jones writes, "The religion of the Quaker is primarily concerned with the culture and development of the inward life and with direct correspondence with God."

Some number of Friends in the early days of the movement not only sought God but found him, though it would perhaps be better to say were found by him. It was because they found God that they had such living worship, such vital meetings. It was because they truly worshiped and had vital meetings that they progressively discovered God and came increasingly within his power. The one led to the other. Without the one we cannot have the other.

That there is that of God in every man was, as already implied, more than a belief or a concept with the early Friends. It was an experience. It was a recovery of the living Deity. As he made and continued to make this recovery in himself, George Fox went about his apostolic work and laid the foundation of what came to be the Society of Friends. What did Fox aim for? How did he regard his ministry? Let him answer in his own words. "I exhorted the people to come off from all these things (from churches, temples, priests, tithes, argumentation, external ceremonies and dead traditions), and directed them to the spirit and grace of God in themselves, and to the light of Jesus in their own hearts, that they might come to know Christ, their free Teacher."

[12]

Pointing as they do to the basis of Friends worship, these several considerations do not, of themselves, throw light on the reason for certain other inward practices. The basis of these other practices is, unfortunately, less simple and less well-known. Why is there need of particular occasions for prayer and worship? Why need we gather together and sit quietly? Why practice waiting before God? If He is in us, why does He not manifest to us continually, why does His power not always motivate our actions? Why do we have to practice His presence, and why is this practice so difficult? To answer these questions we are forced to adopt a somewhat complex and non-habitual view of the situation.

Suppose we are approached by a person of inquiring mind who says, "You say that there is that of God in every man. All right, I am prepared to accept that as truth. But precisely where in us does the divine spark exist? Is it in our bodies? Is it in our ordinary minds and everyday thoughts and emotions? Do you mean to say that God exists in ignorance, in man's prejudices and hatreds, in human evil?" How will we reply? Obviously God does not exist in our trivial actions, nor in our godless thoughts and feelings. Certainly He does not exist in our ignorance and evil. But these things exist in us. They constitute a part of us. This part of us, then, is separated from God, while another part is related to Him. Insofar as we identify with the separated part and believe it to be ourselves, we exist divorced from that of God in us.

[13]

The attitude, in brief, is this. There is that of God in every man. Therefore man, in his entirety, is not separated from God. But man is divided within, and against, himself, into two different and opposing aspects, and one of these aspects is separated from God. This is my view of the situation. If I understand the writings of the early Friends, this was their view of the situation.

The early Friends had names for the part of us that is separated from God. They called it the "natural man," the "earthly man." I shall sometimes refer to it as the "body-mind" or the "separated self." The early Friends called the part of us that is related to God and in which God dwells the "spiritual man," the "new birth," the "new creation." I shall sometimes call it the "inner being," the "spiritual self."

It is of course the separated self that presents the problem. It obstructs our attempts to relate ourselves to God and to our fellow men. It interferes with worship as well as with love. It is because of this self that we do not pray and love as naturally as we breathe. The separated self stands in the way. Therefore it must be overcome. For divine as well as genuinely human purposes it must be subdued and eventually left behind. Every real religious practice, whether of Friends or of others, either directly or indirectly aims to enable human beings to transcend the separated self in order that we may be united with the spiritual self or being which is near God because He dwells therein.

In the light of these facts we can understand the need and the purpose of certain specific inward practices, such as the practice of contending with oneself (Isaac Pennington called it "lawful warring") and the practice of gathering silently and waiting upon God. Since the separated self exists, and is an obstruction, we must contend with it. We contend with it so as to remove it and, at the same time, activate the spiritual nature. Gathering in silence and waiting upon God is necessary for the same reason, and is another means to the same end. More will be said of this presently.

The early Friends, while proclaiming the good news that there is a spiritual man in each and all of us, that God dwells in this part of human beings and is, for this very reason, close even to the earthly man, regarded the earthly man as unregenerate, sinful, blind and dead to the things of the spirit. Only by rising above the earthly aspect of ourselves can we pass from sin into righteousness, from death to life, from that which exists apart from God into that which exists as part of God. Only by yielding to God's power can the earthly man be regenerated. To the degree that this happens, we are unified with our spiritual natures. Thus we are mended and made whole. What formerly was a separated and contrary part, becomes the instrument of expression of the resurrected spiritual being.

[14]

If the earthly man is dead to the things of the spirit, then, as long as he remains so, he obviously can neither truly pray nor truly worship. Nor can we, as long as we remain identified with him.

Should he try to pray, he but prays according to his own ignorant and faulty notions. Should he try to worship, he but worships in his own will, not according to the will of God. Robert Barclay called this kind of worship "will-worship."

Will-worship was what the Friends condemned and tried to avoid. They aimed for true spiritual worship. They wanted to worship God by and through the workings of His spirit and power in their spiritual beings. How were they to fulfill this aim? What, specifically, were they to do? Try, by all available means, to quiet and subdue the earthly man, to lay down his will, to turn the mind to God. But, having done this, they found that something more was wanted. They discovered, as you and I have or will, that it is one thing to still our habitual thoughts and motions, but quite another to cause the spiritual self to arise. By our own efforts we can subdue the body-mind to some extent. Few of us, by our efforts alone, can activate our spiritual natures in a vital and creative way. We need God's help. We need the help of one another. But God's help may not come at once. Our help to each other, even though we are gathered in a meeting for worship or actively serving our fellow men outside of the meeting, may be and often is delayed as regards our kindling one another spiritually. What are we to do in this case? There is only one thing we can do—wait. Having done our part to overcome the separated self, we can but wait for the spiritual self to arise and take command of our lives. Having brought ourselves as close as we can to God, we can but hold ourselves in an attitude of waiting for Him to work His will in us, to draw us fully into His presence.

[15]

So the early Friends engaged in silent waiting, humble yet expectant waiting, reverent waiting upon the Lord, that they might be empowered by Him to help one another and to render to Him the honor and the adoration which, as Robert Barclay said, characterizes true worship; that His power might come over them and cover the meeting; that He might bring about the death of the old, the birth of the new man.

Friends waited, both in and out of meeting. They waited for God to move them, quicken them to life, make them His instruments. They waited for the power of God to do its wonder-work, lifting up the part of them that was akin to Him, gracing them with the miracle of resurrection. Waiting preceded worship. Waiting prepared for worship, and the springing up of new life. By waiting they began worshipping. The stillness of the meeting house, the silence of the lips, the closed eyes and composed faces were the tangible signs of the preliminary period of waiting.

It is instructive and reassuring to note how frequently, among the early Friends, the practice of waiting did have the desired sequel. This seeming inactivity led to spiritual action. Out of this chrysalis what a life was born! God found them in the silence. Blessed and renewing experiences came to Friends, experiences which enabled them to be agents of the divine spirit in every situation of human life. It is instructive because it points us, of this day, to a religious practice that is effective. It is reassuring because from it we may have sound hope that, if we rightly and faithfully engage in this and other inward practices, we may reach and even surpass the high level of religious experience and service attained by Friends in the days when the Quaker movement really moved. In our present-day lives and meetings there can be soul-shaking events. The Light can invade us. Truth can take hold of us. Love may gather us. Above all, God himself may become real to us as the supreme Fact of the entire universe.

[16]

We of this modern age are inclined to be more lenient in our views of the earthly man. We are disposed to consider him a moderately decent fellow except when under the active power of evil. This makes us more tolerant, less intense. It makes us more likely to indulge our fondness for the earthly world and its things and pleasures, less moved to seek God and His Kingdom. Nevertheless if we examine our experience we shall recognize characteristics of the earthly man that are similar to those seen by the early Friends. The outside world has changed considerably in three hundred years, but man's constitution is much the same now as then in all essential respects.

The earthly man, whether we regard him as good, bad, or indifferent, is evidently an exile from God's kingdom. Our body-minds, namely our everyday persons, are out of touch with our spiritual natures most of the time, hence out of touch with God. We, as ordinary people, are not by inclination turned towards God, but, on the contrary, are turned away from Him. Day in and day out we do not even think of the possibility of loving God and doing His will, but think of ourselves, and are bent to enact our own wills, have our own way. Whether we, as earthly men, can truly pray and worship is a question about which there is likely to be disagreement. But who will deny that when we are absorbed in our affairs, as we are most of the time, we do not pray or worship? Recognition of these several facts will lead us to a position similar to that of the early Friends, and point us to the same needs as regards what we must do if we would truly pray and worship, and, indeed, truly live. We too must endeavor to subdue the body-mind and turn the mind Godwards. We too must try to overcome the separated self and re-connect with our spiritual natures. We too must practice waiting. We too must strive to attain the Quaker ideal so well expressed by Douglas Steere, "to live from the inside outwards, as *whole* men."

[17]

When compared with bodily action, what could seem more inactive than waiting upon God? The modern world asks, "Where will that get you?" Young people say, "We want action." Yet, as we have seen, it was precisely through this and other apparently inactive means that the early Friends came into a power of whole action that surpasses anything that we experience today. We say we are activists, but often lack the spiritual force to act effectively. They said they were waiters, and frequently acted as moved by God's light and love. I think that we in this age of decreasing inner-action, of ever increasing outer activity, have a profound lesson to learn from

the early Friends. We had best learn it now, and quickly, lest the faith and practices of the Friends become so watered that they lose their character and flow into the activities of which the world is full, and are absorbed by them, and Friends cease to be Friends. I do not say we should go back to the old days. That is impossible. Let us move forward, as we must if we are to move at all. But let us build upon those foundations, not scrap them. Let those past summits show us how high men can go, with God's help.

Friends are by no means the only ones who realize that the body-mind presents a problem; that, in its usual state, it is an obstacle to worship and to all forms of the religious life. Friends are not alone in recognizing that when the separated self is uppermost and active, the spiritual self is submerged and passive, and that we are called upon to reverse this. All genuine religious people, whatever the religion, have recognized the problem and have endeavored to solve it in one way or another. Generally speaking, there are two ways of dealing with the situation. One way consists of the attempt to lift the body-mind above its usual condition, so that it may be included in the act of worship. The body-mind is presented with sight of religious symbols. It is given sound of religious music and of specially trained speakers called priests or ministers. It participates in rituals, ceremonies, sacraments. This way may be effective. When it is, the body-mind actually is lifted above its usual state, the spiritual nature is evoked. But when this way is not effective it merely results in exciting the body-mind and gives people the illusion that this excitation is true worship. Or it may result in a sterile enactment of outward forms.

[18]

The other way is just the opposite. It consists of the effort to reduce the body-mind below its usual state, so that it will not interfere with worship. All externals are dispensed with. No religious symbols are in view. No music is provided, no rituals, no appointed speakers. The external setting is as plain as possible, so that the body-mind may be more readily quieted. Internally, too, the attempt is to remove all causes of excitement, all of the ordinarily stimulating thoughts, images, desires. The one thought that should be present is the thought of turning Godward, seeking Him, waiting before Him. This way may be effective. When it is, the body-mind is subordinated and ceases to exist as the principal part of man. The spiritual nature is activated and lifted up. When, however, this way is not effective, it merely produces deadness.

In both cases the test is this: Does the spiritual nature arise? Friends have chosen the way of subduing the body-mind, of excluding it from worship except insofar as it may act as an organ of expression of the risen spirit. Having chosen this way, we are called upon to do it effectively, creatively. If we succeed—and we sometimes do—our inner life is resurrected, the whole man is regenerated, and a living worship connects man with God. But if we fail—and we often do—the spiritual nature remains as if dead, and, on top of this, we pile a deadened body-mind. What should be a meeting for worship, a place where man and God come together, becomes a void. There is no life, only a sterile quietism. Sterile quietism is as bad as sterile ritualism.

[19]

Sterility, in whatever form, is what we want to avoid. Creativity is what we must recover—aliveness, growth, moving, wonder, reverence, a sense of being related to the vast motions of that ocean of light and love.

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## WHAT TO DO IN THE MEETING FOR WORSHIP

[20]

**D**EFINITE periods for worship should be established because, constituted as we are, worship does not occur as naturally as it might, and at all times. Unless we set aside regularly recurring times, many of us are not likely to worship at any time. We appoint times and places so that we may do what something deep in us yearns to do, yet which we all too rarely engage in because most often we are caught up in the current of contrary or irrelevant events. Set times of worship not only aid us to worship at those times but at others too; and, of course, the more often we try to worship at other times, the more able we become to make good use of the established occasions.

Among the people of our day, Mahatma Gandhi is an outstanding example of applied religion. It might seem that he, of all people, would feel no need of special times of prayer; yet this is not the case. There are appointed times each day when he and those around him engage in prayer. Whenever possible he attends a Friends meeting for worship. The following quotation from the *Friends Intelligencer* gives his view of this matter. "Discussing the question whether one's whole life could not be a hymn of praise and prayer to one's Maker, so that no separate time of prayer is needed, Gandhi observed, 'I agree that if a man could practice the presence of God all the twenty-four hours, there would be no need for a separate time of prayer.' But most people, he pointed out, find that impossible. For them silent communion, for even a few minutes a day, would be of infinite use."

Each of us individually should daily prepare for worship and, now and again, go off by himself in solitude. Fresh stimulus and challenge are experienced when a man puts himself utterly on his own and seeks to come face to face with his God. Aloneness may release the spirit. So may genuine togetherness. Group or corporate worship is also necessary because, as already mentioned, we need each other's help to quiet the body-mind, to lay down the ordinary self, to lift up the spiritual nature. Many a person finds it possible to become still in a meeting for worship as nowhere else. Peace settles over us. Many a person is inwardly kindled in a meeting for worship as nowhere else. The creative forces begin to stir. When a number of people assemble

[21]

reverently, and all engage in similar inward practices with the same aim and expectancy, life-currents pass between them; a spiritual atmosphere is formed; and in this atmosphere things are possible that are impossible without it. More particularly, we may have opportunity in a meeting for coming close to a person more quickened than we are. By proximity with him or her we are quickened. It is true that in a Friends meeting the responsibility for worship and ministry rests upon each and every member; but it is also true that Friends, like others, must somewhat rely for their awakening upon those who are more in God's spirit and power than the average. We minimize an essential feature of our meetings if we fail to recognize the role of the sheer presence of men and women who are spiritually more advanced than most and are able to act as leaven.

The meeting for worship should begin outside of the meeting house, on our way to it. As we enter the house, we would do well to remind ourselves of the meaning of worship, the significance of corporate worship, the possibility of meeting with God. Be expectant that this may happen in this very gathering. Lift up the mind and heart to the Eternal Being in whom we have brotherhood. The hope is that by these initial acts we will put ourselves in the mood of worship and kindle a warmth of inner life that will continue throughout the meeting and give spiritual meaning to all subsequent efforts.

Settle into your place as an anonymous member of an anonymous group. If you have come to have a reputation among people, forget this and become anonymous. If you have not made a name for yourself, forget this. The opportunity to practice anonymity is a precious one. The meeting for worship would be of great value if it did no more than make this practice possible. If you are accustomed to feel yourself important in the eyes of men, lay it down and feel only that you and others may have some importance in the eyes of God. If you feel unimportant, lay this down. If articulate or inarticulate, forget this. Lay aside all your worldly relationships and your everyday interior states. In fine, forget yourself. Surrender yourself. Immerse yourself in the life of the group. This is our chance to lose ourselves in a unified and greater life. It is our opportunity to die as separated individuals and be born anew in the life and power of the spirit. Seek, in the words of Thomas Kelly, to will your will into the will of God.

[22]

Quiet and relax the body. We should try to quiet its habitual activity, to relax it from strain, yet not over-relax it. Though relaxed it should not become limp or drowsy. It must be kept upright, alert, wakeful. What we desire is a body so poised and at rest that it is content to sit there, taking care of itself, and we can forget it.

Still the mind, gather it, turn it steadfastly towards God. This is more difficult. It is contrary to the mind's nature to be still. It is against its grain to turn Godwards. Left to itself it goes on and on under its own momentum, roaming, wandering. It thinks and pictures and dreams of everything on earth except God and the practice of His presence. Even those who developed great aptitude for taking hold of the mind and turning it to God found it difficult and even painful in the beginning. If we expect it to be easy and pleasant we shall be easily discouraged after a few trials. Brother Lawrence warns us that this practice may even seem repugnant to us at first.

The mind of an adult is more restive and all over the place than the body of a child. How are we to curb its incessant restlessness and stay it upon prayer and worship? How restrain its wanderings and point it to the mark? How take it away from its automatic stream of thoughts and focus it on God? Only by effort, practice, repeated effort, regular practice. It requires life-long preparation and training. We cannot hope to make much progress if we attempt to stay the mind only on First-days during meeting. We must make effort throughout the week, daily, hourly.

[23]

It is by stilling the body-mind that we center down. Put the other way, it is by centering down that we still the body-mind. I would judge that all Friends have in common the practice of centering down. This is our common preparation for worship. From here on, however, each of us is likely to go his individual way, no two ways being alike. This is the freedom of worship which has ever been an integral part of the Friends religion. We are not called upon to follow any fixed procedure. This is creative. The individual spirit is set free to find its way, in its own manner, to God. Yet it leaves some of us at a loss to know what to do next. Some of us are not yet able to press on. We are unsure of the inward way, and our available resources are not yet adequate to this type of exploration. We need hints from others, suggestions, guides. To meet this need, a number of Friends have written of what they do after they center down. Among these writings may be mentioned Douglas V. Steere's *A Quaker Meeting for Worship*, and Howard E. Collier's *The Quaker Meeting*. In the same spirit I would like to indicate what I do.

Once I have centered down I try to open myself, to let the light in. I try to open myself to God's power. I try to open myself to the other members of the meeting, to gain a vital awareness of them, to sense the spiritual state of the gathering. I try so to reform myself inwardly that, as a result of this meeting, I will thereafter be just a little less conformed to the unregenerate ways of the world, just a little more conformed to the dedicated way of love.

I encourage a feeling of expectancy. I invite the expectation that here, in this very meeting, before it is over, the Lord's power will spring up in us, cover the meeting, gather us to Him and to one another. Though meetings come and go, and weeks and even years pass, and it does not happen, nevertheless I renew this expectation at every meeting. I have faith that some day it will be fulfilled. We should be bold in our expectations, look forward to momentous events. We should not be timid or small but large with expectancy, and, at the same time humble, so that there is no egotism in it.

[24]



I kindle the hope that, should the large events not be for me and for us this day, some true prayer will arise from our depths, some act of genuine worship. I hope that at the least I will start some exploration or continue one already begun, make some small discovery, feel my inward life stir creatively and expand to those around me.

Having aroused my expectancy, I wait. I wait before the Lord, forgetting the words in which I clothed my expectations, if possible forgetting myself and my desires, laying down my will, asking only that His will be done. In attitude or silent words I may say, "I am before thee, Lord. If it be thy will, work thy love in me, work thy love in us."

"O wait," wrote Isaac Penington, "wait upon God. Be still a while. Wait in true humility, and pure subjection of soul and spirit, upon Him. Wait for the shutting of thy own eye, and for the opening of the eye of God in thee, and for the sight of things therewith, as they are from Him."

Sometimes, while waiting, a glow steals over me, a warmth spreads from my heart. I have a chance to welcome the welling up of reverence, the sense that I am in the presence of the sacred. Sometimes, though rarely, the practice of waiting is invaded by an unexpected series of inner events which carry me by their action through the meeting to the end. I feel God's spirit moving in me, my spirit awakening to Him.

More often I come to have the sense that I have waited long enough for this time. To forestall the possibility of falling into dead passivity, I voluntarily discontinue the practice of waiting and turn my attention to other concerns. I may summon to mind a vital problem that confronts me or one of my friends, trying to see the problem by the inward light, seeking the decision that would be best. I may bring into consciousness someone I know to be suffering. This may be a personal acquaintance or someone whose plight I have learned of through others, or people in distress brought to my attention by an article in a newspaper or a magazine. I call to him or them in my spirit, and suffer with them, and pray God that through their suffering they will be turned to Him, that by their very pain they may grow up to Him.

[25]

Hardly a meeting passes but what I pray that I and the members of the meeting and people everywhere may have this experience: that our wills be overcome by God's will, that our powers be overpowered by His light and love and wisdom. And sometimes, though again rarely, I find it possible to hold my attention, or, rather, to have my heart held, without wavering, upon the one supreme reality, the sheer fact of God. These are the moments that I feel to be true worship. These are the times when the effort to have faith is superseded by an effortless assurance born of actual experience. God's reality is felt in every fibre of the soul and brings conviction even to the body-mind.

I would not give the impression that what I have described takes place in just this way every time, or that it happens without disruptions, lapses, roamings of the mind, day-dreams. Frequently I must recall myself, again still the mind and turn it Godwards, again practice waiting. All too often I awake to find, no, not that I have been actually sleeping, but that I might as well have been, so far have I strayed from the path that leads to God and brotherhood. And I must confess, too, that during some meetings I have been buried under inertia and deadness and unable to overcome them. Having meant nothing to myself, it is not likely that my presence meant anything to the others. My body was but an object, unliving, filling space on a bench. It would have been better for others had I stayed away. A dead body gives off no life; it but absorbs life from others, reducing the life-level of the meeting.

[26]

As I am one of those who are sometimes moved to speak in meetings, I may indicate how this happens in my case. First let me say what I do not do. I never try to think up something to say. I am quite content to be silent, unless something comes into my mind and I am moved to say it, or unless I sense that the meeting would like to hear a few living words. In this latter case, I may search myself to see what may be found; and by this searching I may set in motion the processes which discover hidden messages.

I never go to the meeting with an "itch" to speak, though it sometimes happens to me, as to others, that I am moved to speak before arriving at the meeting house. Even so, I usually restrain the urge until we have had at least a short period of silent waiting before God. One is vain indeed if he thinks that his words are more important than this waiting. If I have not been moved to speak before arriving, such an impulse, if it comes at all, is likely to arise after I have been waiting a while. It arises within my silence. An insight or understanding flashes into my mind. A prayer or a pleading or a brief exhortation comes upon me. I hold it in mind and look at it, and at myself. I examine it.

Is this a genuine moving that deserves expression in a meeting for worship, or had I best curb and forget it? May it have some real meaning for others, and is it suited to the condition of this meeting? Can I phrase it clearly and simply? If it passes these tests, I regard it as something to be said but I am not yet sure it should be said here and now. To find out how urgent it is, I press it down and try to forget it. If time passes and it does not take hold of me with increased strength, I conclude that it is not to be spoken of at this time. If, on the other hand, it will not be downed, if it rebounds and insists and will not leave me alone, I give it expression.

If it turns out that the words were spoken more in my own will than in the power, I feel that egotistical-I has done it, and that this self-doing has set me apart from the other members of the meeting. I am dissatisfied until again immersed in the life of the group. But if it seems that I have been an instrument of the power, I have the feeling that the power has done it and has, by this

[27]

very act, joined those assembled even closer. Having spoken, I feel at peace once again, warmed and made glowing by the passage of a living current through me to my fellows. With a heightened sense of fellowship with man and God, I resume my silent practices.

I never speak if, in my sense of it, spoken words would break a living silence and disrupt the life that is gathering underneath. But I have on occasion spoken in the hope of breaking a dead silence. Spoken words should arise by common consent. The silence should accept them. The invisible life should sanction them. The members of the meeting should welcome them and be unable to mark exactly when the message began and when it ends. The message should form with the silence a seamless whole.

If the message be a genuine one, the longer I restrain it the better shaped it becomes in my mind and the stronger the impulse to express it. A force gathers behind it. Presently, however, I must either voice it or put it from my mind completely, lest it dominate my consciousness overlong and rule out the other concerns which should engage us in a meeting for worship. It is good when a message possesses us. Our meetings need compelling utterances. But it is not good when a message obsesses us to the exclusion of all else. This is a danger which articulate people, particularly those like myself who have much dealing with words, must avoid. We miss our chance if we do not use the meeting for worship as an opportunity to dwell in the depths of life far below the level of words, rising to the surface only when we are forced to by an upthrust of the spirit which seeks to unite the surface with the depths and gather those assembled into a quickened sense of creative wholeness—each in all and all in God.

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## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[28]

**What moves us to pray and worship?** Sometimes we are moved by a quickened sense of a sacred Presence. Prayer and worship are our spontaneous responses as we awaken to God's unutterable radiance and wonder. Sometimes we are moved by a realization that, left to ourselves, we are inadequate, that apart from God we are insufficient. Realizing that our knowledge is insufficient, we turn to God's light and wisdom. And there are those who pray and worship as a conscious means of growing up to God and becoming firmly established in His kingdom.

**Why do not more people pray?** Why do not all of us worship more often? Many lack a quickened sense of a sacred Presence. Though aware of material things, they are inert to the things of the spirit. They wait to be spiritually awakened. Most of us persist in feeling that we are self-sufficient. We feel we are adequate for all ordinary affairs, and it is only when we find ourselves in overpowering situations that we recognize we are not self-sufficient, and may then turn to God. But when the crisis passes we are likely to lapse into an assumption of self-sufficiency.

**Why do not the leaders of nations turn to God?** Did not the recent war, does not the present chaos of the world show them that their powers and knowledge are inadequate? It would seem that the leaders, despite all evidence to the contrary, still believe that their own powers and politics are enough to prevent war and to secure an ordered and peaceful world.

**When will the people learn? When will the leaders learn?** I do not know, but for the sake of mankind I hope we learn soon. The people of all nations would do well to suspend their ordinary affairs for an hour each day, and, in concert, turn their minds and hearts steadfastly towards God. The purpose of regeneration would be better served in this one hour than in all the other hours of the day.

[29]

**Is the meeting for worship based on silence?** No. Friends know that it is not, yet some Friends have fallen into the habit of saying that it is. Jane Rushmore brought out this point in one of our meetings of Ministry and Counsel. She reminded us that the meeting for worship is based on the conviction that we can directly communicate with God, and He with us. Silence, we believe, is a necessary means to such communion. For if we are busy with our own talk, God will not speak to us. Stillness is a necessary condition for practicing the presence of God. For if we stir about in our own wills, God will not move us. In the meeting for worship we try to obey the command, "Be still, and know that I am God." God is the goal. A living silence is a means thereto.

Recently I was visited by three young Friends, thirteen years of age. They had some problems to talk over. I asked if they felt they knew what to do in the meeting for worship. Their happy confidence that they did know was a pleasant surprise, as I have found many Friends, young and old, who are in need of suggestions and guides. I asked these three what they did in the silence. After some hesitancy, one brightened and replied, "I talk over my problems with God." I told her that was a splendid thing to do. For young people of thirteen or thereabouts, it is enough that they talk over their problems with God, or engage in some other simple and sincere exercise. For some older people one or two simple practices are enough. I am in sympathy with those who would worship in simplicity of mind and heart. But others are in need of more, and the preceding chapter tries to speak to this need. Whatever the means used, the important thing is that we spiritually awake and come alive during the meeting for worship even more than at other times.

**Who should speak in the meeting for worship?** Anyone who is genuinely moved to. Age has nothing to do with it, though older people may be more able because of longer practice.

Education has nothing to do with it, though education may facilitate verbal expression. The essential matter is the inward prompting, under God's guidance. The Book of Discipline says, "Our conviction is that the Spirit of God is in all, and that vocal utterance comes when this Spirit works within us. The varying needs of a meeting can be best supplied by different personalities, and a meeting is enriched by the sharing of any living experience of God."

**What are we to do if we feel genuinely moved to speak but are inhibited by the fear of not expressing ourselves well?** Attend to what you have to say. Put your mind on that, and take it off yourself. Do not be concerned that your speech may be halting and imperfect. Do not compare yourself with others, thinking that they speak fluently, you poorly. Be concerned to communicate. Summon up your courage and break the ice. Try. If you can once overcome an inhibition, you have broken its hold. It will still be there, but you can overcome it more readily the next time. Keep trying.

It is true that some people seem born with the facility to speak, but it is also true that the ability, like other abilities, is developed by practice. Most of those who speak well now, began with embarrassment, self-consciousness, and an imperfect command of words. Friends can be counted on to understand if at first your thoughts and feelings are not expressed as well as they might be. They will attend more to what you are trying to say than to how you say it. Here again the Book of Discipline gives wise counsel. "One who is timid or unaccustomed to speak should have faith that God will strengthen him to give his message."

**When should we speak in the meeting for worship?** Whenever we are moved to. We may be moved to speak near the beginning, midway, or towards the end. The important thing is not the time but the moving. However, as Rufus Jones once pointed out, it sometimes helps if, once we are really settled, something is said that lifts the spirit, that raises us above our worldly problems and gives impetus to our search for the indwelling divinity.

**What should be spoken of in the meeting for worship?** This question will be answered for us, inwardly, if we are in the spirit of the meeting, if the meeting is in God's spirit. We may speak of spiritual things. We may speak of daily affairs and events, if these are given a spiritual interpretation. We may speak of world problems, if these are seen in the light of religion. Anything that comes from the heart is proper and acceptable. We will not go wrong if we keep in mind the central purpose of the meeting for worship, and are striving to fulfill this purpose. Let your heart respond to the need of our meetings for a vital ministry. Open yourself and accept, should it come to you, the call to an inspired ministry.

[31]

**Should messages come one after the other in rapid succession?** No. There should be a due interval between them, a living silence in which the spirit works deep below the level of words. Messages should arise from the silence and return to it. Of course there are times when one message arises from another. Even so, there should be pauses between them during which the creative forces may operate in unexpected ways. Restraint of speech improves both the speech and the silence. Read what Thomas Kelly has to say of spoken words in his pamphlet, *The Gathered Meeting*.

But more frequently some words are spoken. I have in mind those meeting hours which are not dominated by a single sermon, a single twenty-minute address, well-rounded out, with all the edges tucked in so there is nothing more to say. In some of our meetings we may have too many polished examples of homiletic perfection which lead the rest to sit back and admire but which close the question considered, rather than open it. Participants are converted into spectators; active worship on the part of all drifts into passive reception of external instruction. To be sure, there are gathered meetings, which arise about a single towering mountain peak of a sermon. One kindled soul may be the agent whereby the slumbering embers within are quickened into a living flame.

But I have more particularly in mind those hours of worship in which no one person, no one speech stands out as the one that "made" the meeting, those hours wherein the personalities that take part verbally are not enhanced as individuals in the eyes of others, but are subdued and softened and lost sight of because in the language of Fox, "The Lord's power was over all." Brevity, earnestness, sincerity—and frequently a lack of polish—characterizes the best Quaker speaking. The words should rise like a shaggy crag upthrust from the surface of silence, under the pressure of river power and yearning, contrition and wonder. But on the other hand the words should not rise up like a shaggy crag. They should not break the silence, but continue it. For the Divine Life who was ministering through the medium of silence is the same Life as is now ministering through words. And when such words are truly spoken "in the Life," then when such words cease the *uninterrupted* silence and worship continue, for silence and words have been of one texture, one piece. Second and third speakers only continue the enhancement of the moving Presence, until a climax is reached, and the discerning head of the meeting knows when to break it.

[32]

**What are we to do if some Friends are sometimes over-vocal about matters that are hardly the proper concern for a Meeting for Worship?** How are we to regard those who do

not always speak acceptably to us, or are overlong in their words, or who get up and repeat what we have heard them say again and again? Instead of viewing them as objects of criticism, separated from you, try to feel them as being together with you in a common life, and pray that the Creator of this life may make all expressions living expressions. Do not let your resentment build up, but increase your humility by recognizing that the faults that others display may well be your own.

**How are we to manage the occasional rustlings and noises, within and without the meeting, that threatens to distract us and draw us away from worship?** Here Douglas Steere has a helpful practice. Try to include these distractions in one's worship. Instead of attempting to exclude them, weave them into your efforts to practice the presence of God. Read what Douglas Steere has to say of this in *A Quaker Meeting for Worship*.

But again and again before I get through this far in prayer my mind has been drawn away by some distraction. Someone has come in late. Two adorable little girls who are sitting on opposite sides of their mother are almost overcome by delight in something which is much too subtle to be comprehended by the adult mind, the drafts in the coal stove need readjusting, how noisy the cars are out on the highway today, the wind howls around the corner and rattles the old pre-revolutionary glass in the window sashes. Do these rude interruptions destroy the silent prayer? Well, there was a time when they did, and there are times still when they interfere somewhat, but for the most part, I think they help. The late-comers stir me to a resolve to be more punctual myself—a fault I am all too well aware of—and I pass directly on to prayer, glad that they have come today. The little girls remind me of the undiscovered gaiety in every cell of life that these little "bon-vivants" know ever so well, and they remind me too that a meeting for worship must be made to reach these fierce-eyed nine- and ten-year-olds, and I pass on. I get up and open the draft in the coal stove. Sometimes I pray the distractions directly into the prayer—"swift, hurrying life of which these humming motors are the symbol—pass by at your will—I seek the still water that lies beneath these surface waves," or "the wind of God is always blowing but I must hoist my sail," and proceed with my prayer.

[33]

**What are we to do when a meeting is unliving?** Suffer it. Continue to do your part to contribute to the life. Continue to pray that God will quicken the meeting, shake it awake. Suppose you yourself are heavy with inertia and feel more dead than alive. The only way to overcome inertia is to become active. Since, in a meeting for worship, our bodies are still, the only positive action is inner-action. We have already considered several inward practices that facilitate inner-action. Engage in one or more of these with renewed determination. See your deadness as a challenge and resolve not to be overcome by it but to overcome it. Struggle against it. Persist in the act of turning your mind and heart Godwards. Kindle your expectancy. Wait before the Lord. Think of Him. Pray Him to send His life into you, and into the meeting, and into the people of the world. Should these inward practices prove of no avail, I sometimes fall back on this device. There is always in us some theme that the mind wants to think of, some fear, some desire, some problems, some situation, some prospect. Though the theme is not a fit one for a meeting for worship, I let my mind run on about it. Once the mind is well started on this topic, I switch it and transfer its momentum to one of the practices that prepare for worship.

[34]

**How should we come to meeting?** Reluctantly? No. Burdened by a feeling of obligation to attend? No. Expecting something dull and tedious? No! If a meeting evokes only dullness in its members it is a dead meeting and ought to be laid down. A live meeting evokes life. Just the prospect of attending such a meeting should quicken us. It were better to come alive doing housework than to become deadened in a meeting house.

Come with the expectancy that, as you make effort to turn yourself Godwards, the life deep within you will arise, and meet you half-way, and call you, and draw you, gather you into God's presence. Come with the hope that the Teacher within will teach you of spiritual things. Come with the expectancy that as you meet with other Friends, in this very gathering you and they will be shaken awake by the impact of God's power, and made to tremble, and become actual Quakers. Come with the prayer that one and all may be "brought through the very ocean of darkness and death, by the eternal, glorious power of Christ, into the ocean of light and love."

**What should we do, in and out of meeting, in our periods of worship and in our daily lives?** Practice the presence of God. Practice, as far as we are able, the love of God and the love of man and all creation. But let George Fox declare it to us, as he declared it to the early Friends and to people of all ranks and conditions in two continents. "All people must first come to the Spirit of God in themselves, by which they might know God and Christ, of whom the prophets and apostles learnt; by which Spirit they might have fellowship with the Son, and with the Father, and with the Scriptures, and with one another; and without this Spirit they can know neither God nor Christ, nor the Scriptures, nor have right fellowship one with another."

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