

Quaker worship happens when two or more people feel the need to be still together, expecting to experience God's presence. Though this can happen anywhere and at any time, Friends usually use the phrase to mean the meeting which takes place regularly at a Friends meeting house. There is no prearranged service or appointed minister, but in attentive waiting together in silence. Quakers can find peace of mind, a renewed sense of purpose for living, and joy to wonder at God's creation.

Silence is valued by Quakers because in removing pressure and hurry, it allows them for a while to be aware of the inner and deeper meaning of their individual and corporate lives. They are able to begin to accept themselves as they are and to find some release from fear, anxiety, emotional confusion and selfishness. The silence is more than an absence of sound: one can be aware on one level of external sounds, a dog barking, a car passing, a child calling. But these sounds are not distractions. They are absorbed, often unconsciously, as people try to be open to that of God within them. One can understand the words of one of the first Friends who said: 'I found the evil in me weakening and the God raised up'.

People arrive at a meeting as separate individuals with their own particular joys and anxieties, and the group begins

to 'gather'. Those present settle quietly, having made themselves comfortable, and by seeking God's will together, become open to one another at a deep level. This may happen quickly, or it may take most of the hour.

The silence is different from that experienced in, traditional, solitary meditation, which is normally an activity which takes place deep inside oneself, as a devotional exercise for one's own spiritual development. The listening and waiting in a Friends meeting is a shared experience in which worshippers seek to meet God: the seating is usually arranged in a circle or a square to help people be aware of one another and conscious of the fact that they are worshipping together.

Friends may worship entirely without words, but usually there will be some brief spoken contributions, aiming to express aloud what is already present in the silence. Anyone may feel the call to speak, man, woman or child, Friend or first time visitor. There is a wide variety of sources of spoken ministry and the acceptance of them is an important part of Quaker worship. Since the Society of Friends is part of the Christian tradition, people may speak of the life and teaching of Jesus. They may use words from other sources or refer to events in daily life. Because ministry may arise from personal



experiences and insights there will be different approaches. Friends try to receive positively what is said and to look for the underlying truth, regardless of the words in which it is expressed..

The hope is that by the close of the meeting, all will feel united and be aware that they have come close to God. Sometimes this does not happen, but when a meeting is well held there is no doubt that God has been present, and the worshippers carry the experience forward into the coming days and weeks.

Books for further reading

The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship.
George Gorman, QHS 1973, reprinted 1993
God is Silence. Pierre Lacout, QHS 1969,
reprinted 2006

Quaker Worship



Photograph: Phillip Meech

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