

A Quaker meeting creates a space of gathered stillness. We come together where we can listen to the promptings of truth and love in our hearts, which we understand as arising from God. Our meetings are based on silence: a silence of waiting and listening. There may be silence for quite some time, perhaps half an hour or more. But that does not mean nothing is happening.

We are caught up in the still spirit of the meeting, and all of us are trying to come nearer to each other and to God, without reciting creeds, singing hymns or repeating set prayers. We do not worship in isolation: we try to hold ourselves aware of all those gathered with us, uniting in a common purpose, so that the waiting and listening become an act of sharing.

We come to meeting because we feel the need to worship. It is important to us. Meeting for worship starts as soon as the first person enters the room and sits down. It helps if the meeting can settle a few minutes before the appointed time.

Go in as soon as you are ready. Sit anywhere you like, but if possible leave seats near the door and at the end of rows for latecomers. Children may be present for a time at the beginning or at the end of meeting, and have their own activities in another room.

You may find it easy to relax in the silence and enter into the spirit of the meeting, or you may be disturbed by the strangeness of the silence, by distractions outside or by your own

thoughts. Don't worry about this. We all find it difficult to settle at times. When we return again and again to the still centre of our being, we can know the presence of God. Try, if only for brief periods, to be quiet in mind, body and spirit. Bring whatever is pressing on your mind to the meeting. It can be a time of insight, revelation, healing or calm.

Nearly everyone at some time seems to want to find God in themselves, even those who find it hard to believe that God exists. Using a different image or concept such as 'spirit' or 'light' can be helpful.

The silence may be broken if someone present feels called to say something which will deepen and enrich the worship. Anyone is free to speak, pray or read aloud, as long as it is done in response to a prompting of the spirit which comes in the course of the meeting. This breaks the silence for the moment, but does not interrupt it.

Listen with an open mind to what is said. Each contribution may help somebody, but our needs are different and can be met in different ways. If something does not speak to your condition or need, try to reach the spirit behind the words. The speaker wants to help the meeting, so take care not to reject the offering by negative criticism.

Each of us brings our own life experience to meeting. Some people will have a profound sense of awe and wonder because they know God is present. Others will be far less certain.

They may only be ready to hold an awareness that their experiences in life point beyond themselves to a greater whole. Some will thankfully accept God's inexhaustible love shown in Jesus, the promise of forgiveness and the setting aside of past failure. Others will know their direction is a seeking to be open towards people in a spirit of love and trust.

In the quietness of a Quaker meeting worshippers can become aware of a deep and powerful spirit of love and truth, transcending their ordinary experience. We seek to become united in love and strengthened in truth, so we enter a new level of living, despite the different ways we may account for this life-expanding experience.

After about an hour, two people (usually called elders) will shake hands to mark the end of the worship. The clerk may then announce forthcoming events and give news of members. Afterwards, do feel free to speak to anyone, particularly if you wish to know more about Quakers. Literature is usually available and books can often be borrowed.

While sitting in meeting for the first time you may find it helpful to re-read this leaflet.

For free information about Quakers contact:

Quaker Life Outreach
Friends House
Euston Road
London NW1 2BJ
Email: outreach@quaker.org.uk
Freephone: 0808 109 1651

www.quaker.org.uk



Your first time at a Quaker meeting



Photograph: Peter Daniels