

THE MINISTRY of SILENCE

In the Quaker practice of group worship on the basis of silence come special times when the electric hush and solemnity and depth of power steals over the worshippers. A blanket of divine covering comes over the room. A quickening Presence pervades us, breaking down some part of the special privacy and isolation of our individual lives and blending our spirits within a super individual Life and Power. An objective, dynamic Presence enfolds us all, nourishes our souls, speaks glad, unutterable comfort within us, and quickens us in depths that had before been slumbering. The Burning Bush has been kindled in our midst, and we stand together on holy ground.

Thomas Kelly

We do not, however, come alone to the meeting. For the needs of those within and without meeting sit down with us. They sit down with us in the person of our bodies which connect us with the whole of the natural creation and every exchange of breath reveals our profound dependence on the rest of nature and discloses to our responsibility for it. They sit down with us in the persons next to us, each of whom is the center of a world of his or her own, and who yearns as I do for the great tendering, the new angle of vision, the regrouping within, that would respond to the deepest thing that we know. They sit down with us, the wretched and the poor of the earth, both in spirit and in body, and a new feeling sense of our unity with them may be opened in that sitting.

Douglas Steere

As iron sharpeneth iron, the seeing of the faces one of another when both are inwardly gathered into the life, giveth occasion for the life secretly to rise and pass from vessel to vessel. And as many candles lighted put in one place do greatly augment the light and make more shine forth, so when many are gathered together into the same life, there is more of the glory of God and his power appears, to the refreshment of each individual; he partakes not only of the light and life raised in himself, but in all the rest.

Robert Barclay

What has been your experience of the ministry of silence?

VOCAL MINISTRY

The theory of the Quaker ministry is simple. As the worshipers sit together in silence to wait upon the Lord, anyone among them may find arising in her consciousness a message which she feels is intended for more than herself alone. It is then her obligation to deliver that message and to cease speaking when she has delivered it. She must learn to recognize the unique sense of urgency which is evidence of a divine requirement.

Howard Brinton

I think that learning to move in the exercise of the meeting so that one is a part of it, yet taken beyond it and brought to see some new light as a result of it, is most important in creative ministry. The cluster of messages, with a fair interval of silence between each of them to let its insight sink in; the cluster that goes on down, with each message deepening and intensifying and helping to light up a further facet of the communication, can be most effective. But for this to happen, those sharing in it cannot be in a dicussional frame of mind, or in a debating stance, or yield to the ruthlessly critical mind, or all is lost and the meeting is pulled into a forum. It can only be done if there is a willingness to be led by each of the ones ministering into a deeper level of what they were not only saying but what they were meaning to say, and perhaps even beyond into what something beneath us all was meaning to have said through what we were saying and were meaning to say. When a cluster ministry moves in this way, we all know that we are moving in the life, that we are breaking the cerebral barrier and being released, that our greatest need is being met and we rejoice or we are convicted or we are ourselves ignited into flame by what is taking place.

Douglas Steere

To rise to speak has been in our tradition an awesome responsibility. Yet, the first lesson of the (vocal) minister may be, "Hear and obey." If our personal and corporate practice is directed to listening for the guidance of the Spirit among us, there can be no more appropriate response to that Guidance than to yield to it.

Patricia Loring

What has been your experience of vocal ministry?