

The Hidden Ritual in the Meeting for Worship

By Maurine Pyle

Quaker tradition and practice provides some concrete guidance to help us work together in harmony in the meeting for worship. Here are just a few ground rules that have been found helpful in centering into sacred space.

- Try to arrive early or at least on time. When we begin together at the appointed hour, we can enter into silence without interruption.
- Allow a long period of silence at the beginning of worship so that people can center down. We all carry worries and need time to lay them down before we enter into the deep.
- Before speaking, ask yourself if the message is from the Spirit. Also, is it meant for the whole group or for yourself alone? Spend a moment in discernment to determine if it is time to share it.
- If it is clear that the Spirit is moving you, then rise to speak. This allows your voice to be heard. We have many people among us who have difficulty with their hearing. Rising also symbolizes your commitment to be identified as someone speaking on behalf of the Spirit.
- Speak only once. Your moved speech is valued, and equally so is your listening. Speaking once allows for another voice to be heard.
- Let your message come from the mystical experience of feeling God in your heart. The term Quaker refers to the quaking that some people experience before speaking. Some people feel overtaken by joy before sharing vocal ministry or a song. You may find yourself on your feet without knowing how you got there. But have no fear you will know when it is your time to share a message and what message is to be shared.
- Prepared messages or readings will be taken as coming from your own need to instruct the group rather than from the leadings* of group worship. An exception is the reading of the monthly query.

- Be brief, if you can. A long and rambling message may affect the meditation of those around you.
- Allow time between vocal offerings. Deep listening allows the message to resonate within us so that we can find our personal application.
- Be conscious of the gifts of ministry being offered by the children. Listen to them, observe them, and love them.

Your gifts of vocal ministry, of silence, and of listening are equally vital to the life of the meeting for worship. As the old Quaker motto says, “Come to meeting neither prepared to speak nor not prepared to speak.” In other words, come and bring a welcoming heart to the leadings of the Spirit.

*A “leading” in Quaker terminology, refers to direct guidance from the Divine.

Elias Hicks (1748-1830) “The more strictly every man and woman lives up to the guidance of this inward anointing... the more instruction and help they afford one another.”

Possible Queries for Reflection

- What has stirred during the quiet for you?
- What did that process feel like and were you moved to share your new insight?
- In what ways does silence connect to compassion and presence?
- Did the silence transform your understanding or move you toward a leading beyond vocal ministry?