Quakers and Silence

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For three hundred years, Quakers have based the most sacred act of religious observance, the Meeting For Worship upon this most fragile, most sensitive, most easily shattered thing, … silence.

In the gathered meeting, it often happens that individual worship merges into a greater whole, and in the stillness comes an upsurge of spiritual power and a clearness of vision which is far beyond what each one can attain alone.

Silence is one of the profound bases upon which life is founded. It is so fundamental, so normal that like the sky above and the earth beneath, we take it for granted and scarcely give it a thought. An intense need arises to come in touch with inner reserves which in all times have been man's stay.

We know that silence is not in itself the Inner Light, but we believe it is the setting, the favorable atmosphere for that of which we are in search.

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Silence

THIS is the only way to know God. 'Be still, and know that I am God.' 'God is in His Holy Temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.'

A score of years ago, a friend placed in my hand a little book which became one of the turning points of my life. It was called 'True Peace.' It was an old medieval message, and it had but one thought, and it was this-that God was waiting in the depths of my being to talk to me if I would only get still enough to hear His voice.

I thought this would be a very easy matter, and so I began to get still. But I had no sooner commenced than a perfect pandemonium of voices reached my ears, a thousand clamouring notes from without and within, until I could hear nothing but their noise and din. Some of them were my own voice, some of them were my own questions, some of them were my own cares, some of them were my very prayers. Others were the suggestions of the tempter and the voices of the world's turmoil. Never before did there seem so many things to be done, to be said, to be thought; and in every direction I was pushed and pulled, and greeted with noisy acclamations of unspeakable unrest. It seemed necessary for me to listen to some of them, and to answer some of them; but God said, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Then came the conflict of thoughts for the morrow, and its duties and cares; but God said, 'Be still.' And as I listened and slowly

learned to obey, and shut my ears to every sound,I found after awhile that when the other voices ceased, or I ceased to hear them, there was a still, small voice in the depths of my being that began to speak with an inexpressible tenderness, power, and comfort. As I listened, it became to me the voice of prayer, and the voice of wisdom, and the voice of duty, and I did not need to think so hard, or pray so hard, or trust so hard, but that 'still, small voice' of the Holy Spirit in my heart was God's prayer in my secret soul, was God' s answer to all my questions, was God's life and strength for soul and body, and became the substance of all knowledge, and all prayer, and all blessing; for it was the living God Himself as my life and my all.

This is our spirit's deepest need. It is thus that we learn to know God; it is thus that we receive spiritual refreshment and nutriment; it is thus that our heart is nourished and fed; it is thus that we receive the Living Bread; it is thus that our very bodies are healed, and our spirit drinks in the life of our risen Lord, and we go forth to life's conflicts and duties like the flower that has drunk in, through the shades of night, the cool and crystal drops of dew. But, as the dew never falls on a stormy night, so the dews of His grace never come to the restless soul.

We cannot go through life strong and fresh on constant express trains; but we must have quiet hours, secret places of the Most High, times of waiting upon the Lord, when we renew our strength, and learn to mount up on wings as eagles, and then come back to run and not be weary, and to walk and not faint.

The preceding was taken from a tract titled "Silence", written by Martin Hope Sutton in 1901.

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Be still and listen. When we subtract, remove the things in our lives that hinder or interfere with listening, we are able to settle into the quiet rest of inner silence where all our strivings cease.

The silence we value is not the mere outward silence of the lips. It is a deep quietness of heart and mind, a laying aside of all preoccupation with passing things. Yes, even with the workings of our own minds.

Since their beginnings, Friends, Quakers have proclaimed that Christ has come to teach people directly. Discarding rituals and creeds, Friends approach God inwardly, as they center down in silence.

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The power of silence, I believe, is that you can't escape it. You can't talk your way out of it. There it is and there you are and unless you get up and leave, you're a part of it.

Silence forces you to face yourself. You can't get away from your own thoughts, whatever's going through your own mind. You can try to quiet your mind and to allow the Spirit to enter it and to fill it, but that is difficult at times, especially if you're full of a great deal of activity. Most of us these days are. We rush to Meeting or we drive a car and we don't pick violets on the way.

There's a great deal of disturbance in our lives so I suppose for most of us it takes a good share of that hour or three quarters of an hour to settle down, to settle into silence as Friends would term it.

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Quakers are people seeking to keep God at the center of life by living simply, peacefully, and with integrity. For centuries, Quakers have shared their practical experience and valuable lessons in their advices handed down to each generation. Quakers also regularly ask and answer a list of queries or questions. Rather than ask if you believe in telling the truth, Friends might ask: has thee been truthful today?

Historically, Quakers were the first religious group to recognize the equality of men and women. They were active in abolishing slavery and they treated Native Americans with respect as equals. They implemented reforms in prisons and mental health hospitals. In 1947, Quakers were awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.

Quakers remain very active with programs all over the world today.

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From Fairhope Friends Meeting:

Worship is a personal communion with God and a yielding of our wills to the Divine Will for which no ritual, form, service nor aid of clergy is necessary.

We have a heartfelt concern that our meetings offer a form of worship which is pure, simple, and spiritual. We meet together in silence and seek to free our minds and hearts for the purpose of spiritual worship.

Worship should not be the mere outward gathering of persons, but an inward gathering of hearts unto the Lord. Our worship is based on the eternal reality that God is Spirit and the experience of worship must be in Spirit and in Truth. The prayers of the eternal Christ for us are not just words but holy and creative energies: they are power that enters into us and becomes one with us, giving us ability and opportunity to change, to grow, and to be renewed in character and conduct.

Christ comes to us asking us only to respond to Him: when that response is made, worship is achieved We have opened the door upon which He has been knocking. In the spirit of seeking, we come to know Him and begin to understand the many ways in which He speaks to us.

As the meeting for worship becomes a vital experience for its members, it will quietly invade the homes of its members with a calm, creative spirit and will mold and unite them with the force of Divine love. This Divine love is the greatest force in the world.

We place special emphasis on the ever present Holy Spirit within the heart of man. We call this power the Light Within or the Light of Christ. We feel that every person has a seed of this spirit within them and the choice is theirs whether they cultivate it so it will flourish or allow it to die from neglect. Love, which is the outworking of this Divine Spirit, is the most potent influence that can be applied to the affairs of people. This application of love to the whole of life is the core of the Christian doctrine. As the Christian becomes conscious of the Inner Light or the Christ within and submits themselves to His leadings, they are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live in conformity to the will of their Heavenly Father.

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The following is taken from Friends United Meeting:

Living a good life is not a matter of following outward rules that God is holding over our heads. Goodness comes into our lives spiritually through the inward presence and guidance of Jesus Christ.

Friends offer this advice: Take heed dear friends to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts, which are the leadings of God. We have found that those who listen to God's inward guidance gradually find their lives changed, so that they become more like Christ.

This is the source of the testimonies to peace, simplicity, equality, and integrity for which Friends, Quakers are known. Listening to Christ. It is a simple faith that leads to a transformed life.