

ASK Quakers what they value most in their experience of the Society of Friends, and they will invariably reply the Quaker Meeting for Worship. Ask them why, and they will probably say that in the quiet of the simple meeting room, as they join with others in a creative silence, they find peace of mind, and a renewed sense of purpose for living. Ask them how this comes about, and they will answer in terms of their own experience, which will vary from person to person, but will fall broadly within the range of the points outlined in the following paragraphs. For the Quaker approach to religion is both individual and communal.

Quakers go to their Meetings for Worship not primarily from a sense of duty, but because they want and need to do so: for this reason the Meeting for Worship is the core of the Society's life. The name Quakers give to this central activity means exactly what it says. It aims to be a gathering of people with one another in love and tenderness, sympathy and understanding, far removed from a casual, shallow, passing encounter.

A Quaker Meeting is the opportunity for a real encounter between persons in depth, for we seek to be open to one another at the most profound level of our existence. It is at this deep, still centre of our being that we know ourselves as real persons. From it arise our most valid insights into the motives and meaning of our lives. It is here also that we

are most aware of our relationship to others.

All real life consists in such meetings, and all personal encounters at this depth point to a mystery which transcends human experience, yet is never divorced from it. We discover, and are discovered by an awareness of love which gives meaning and purpose to living.

In deliberately setting aside a time in which we give conscious recognition to the deepest values by which we try to live, and in which we are drawn into a profound and meaningful communion with our friends, we find a sense of awe growing in us at the wonder of this rich experience.

In our deepest being we know that through the awareness of our real selves, and through our relationship with others, we have touched the kind of experience that saints and mystics have known, and that Jesus called God.

As those present respond to the living experience of a Quaker Meeting they are able to accept themselves as they are. They begin to find release from frustration, fear, anxiety, emotional confusion and selfish concern. They are able to identify themselves more fully with others for they are no longer isolated individuals, but members of a living community. Their total experience of life is enriched as they enter a new dimension of living. They know what one of the first Friends meant when he said, 'I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up'.

Each Quaker Meeting will develop a life of its own, and such a spontaneous and creative encounter does not lend itself to an imposed programme. So it is impossible to forecast exactly what will happen. There is no formal start to a Meeting, for it begins as people arrive. Quaker Meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend, and visitors are welcomed to share fully in them.

Sometimes a Meeting will be entirely silent, but usually there are a few brief spoken contributions. They can be given by men or women, who may or may not be members of the Society. Ideally words spoken in Meeting should aim to make explicit what is already implicit in the silence, and are intended to encourage and deepen the awareness of the spiritual values on which the Meeting is based. They may take many forms and can include readings from the Bible or other books, prayers, or the descriptions of events or insights that have helped the speaker to an understanding of the true meaning of life.

Whatever is said will naturally be expressed in the language of those who speak, but they will try to be sensitive to the deepest level of experience in the Meeting itself, for it should be this that has prompted them to speak.

Because Quakers encourage people to be loyal to their personal insights and experience, there is a great variety of approach among them to religious matters. This is reflected in the underlying attitude of

Meeting, and also in what is said: this variety greatly enriches Quaker life. Some will express their sincere convictions in traditional Christian language, while others will use words which do not appear to have any particular religious content.

A similar variety will be found in the levels of experience of those attending Meeting. Some will have a strong, deep faith, while others will be more aware of their doubts and difficulties, than of their convictions.

The Meeting will be successful as each person, while taking it at their own pace, is also receptive to new light wherever it arises, and tries to be responsive to the love and warmth of the Meeting. All will need to keep in mind the experience of Quakers, today and in the past, that, as people seek to follow a way of life in the spirit of love that Jesus so clearly focussed in his life, and in the way in which he met his death, they will discover a clue to authentic living today. There is of course no guarantee that a Quaker Meeting will always succeed in its aims - sometimes it fails. But when it is well held they have no doubt about its validity.

A Quaker Meeting does not end when the period of worship closes, for those who have shared in it will continue to live in its strength. It is as they seek to interpret its deep meaning into action in their lives, that the validity of this approach to worship is finally vindicated.

This leaflet has been produced by the Outreach Working Group of Staffordshire Area Meeting with the approval of the Elders and Overseers of the Meeting and of Area Meeting itself.

The text is identical to the pre-1989 Quaker Worship leaflet published by Quaker Home Service, Friends House, London NW1 2BJ, except for minor alterations to make it gender neutral. We have chosen to publish this updated version of the old text because we feel it reflects the spirit and diversity of Quaker Worship better than the post-1989 version.

Staffordshire Area Meeting, 2008.

For more information about Quakers in Staffordshire visit:

[www.staffs-quakers.org.uk](http://www.staffs-quakers.org.uk)

# *Quaker Worship*



Unity in Diversity