



Talking Points

Listening beyond Language

Worship

Have you ever asked yourself, *What is worship? And why do you worship?* These and many other questions have arisen for me. Before I used to just do it—sing, and that was all, but now worship plays a really important role in my daily life. For me it is a very important experience. It is a way of communicating with God through song.

To pray in song is something that wells up from the depths of your heart, like looking for the pearl of great price in the bottom of the sea. You are the sea and the pearl is your heart directed to God. When you worship, what do you do? Do you really feel what comes out of your mouth when you praise? Often we worship when our hearts are not really in it, and we don't see the true way of worshipping, which is unforgettable and edifying. I share with you a little experience when I participated in a gathering of UJESA (Santidad Friends Youth Gathering) that took place in the town of Patamanta. All the young brothers and sisters worshipped and praised God, and when we did it we felt it in our hearts! How beautiful it was! Lots of young people came who were seeking the same thing I was looking for with such devotion.

It is in this way that we all have experiences and we learn and return with more strength to carry on and not grow weary. It is like when a lion pursues its prey, the prey falls but gets up with more strength than before. This is how a Friend should get up when she/he falls. Also, worship gives consolation in moments of anguish, and happiness when one is cheerful. It functions as a complement to our faith, something like the sand is to the sea. As the word of God says, "Is someone happy? Sing praises. Is someone afflicted? Pray."

So, the only thing we can do when we are giving praise or adoration, let's not do it half-heartedly, but rather with our whole heart. Let's not fall away, but press on, persevere, and continue to follow the footsteps of the Master until the end of our lives.

Fanny Mamani

Bolivian Holiness Mission of EFCI

Bolivia

Cultural Activities

The founders who established the Quaker church held their rules and beliefs, which they followed from that time until now. The leaders of the Quaker church still follow the ways and rules of those who established the church a long time ago, e.g., they say that George Fox used to conduct the church slowly and there was no clapping of hands in the church. So they have remembered such steps, thus making the church be like a cult. They [aren't] to be led by the Holy Spirit, but they follow the culture, thus the church is not growing.

The Quaker church is among the first churches that were established in the country [of Kenya], but when it comes to development and growth it is really behind as compared to other churches. This is just because they don't want changes in the church. Also because of the culture of the church, which does not allow use of musical instruments such as keyboards, *kayambe*, and others. This has really made the church to be boring when it comes to worship and praising, thus it ends up losing many youth who go to fellowship in other denominations, thus leaving the Quaker church because of the culture of the church. And remember, it does not even attract people or Christians from other denominations to join

them, but it always loses more Christians to other churches.

*Liani Phylis
Kwanza Secondary School
Kenya*

The Subtle Power of Meeting for Worship

Quaker worship carries a subtle and transformative power. The work of Christ in the worship service is often accomplished over the course of time. My spiritual journey has had truly powerful experiences, but upon reflection I realize that God was transforming me into Christ-likeness over years, not moments. This idea is seen in the Creation account of Genesis, chapter one. God did not form the universe with one motion; rather, it was a process by which land and life were formed over time. The same is true for Paul, who experienced the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, but continued to grow and mature in faith until the end of Acts when he proclaimed, *"I have had God's help to this very day"* (Acts 26:22, NIV). Spending my formative years attending meeting for worship was instrumental in developing my image of God.

As a boy I remember the unwavering consistency of the First Day worship. Before service, I would walk the same aisle of our meeting room toward my favorite pew and see the same faces. Because nearly everyone sat in their specific places, I knew who was absent with a glance. After getting a bulletin from the friendly usher, I would get a mint from the church candy man and I would find my seat in the back. After getting settled I would say a little prayer that the regular entourage of elderly ladies would *not* come by, pinch my cheeks, and tell me how cute I was! My prayer was rarely answered. The service began at eleven a.m. sharp, and not a moment later. Huffs and groans were heard if the service went more than a few minutes after noon.

My meeting lacked the jumbo-tron, smoke, and mirrors that are considered essential in many of today's Christian congregations. There were no altar calls or dancing in the aisles. I am told that the sermons were always very good, but I rarely pulled myself away from my games of tic-tac-toe on the back of the bulletin to hear a word. The worship would be considered by many to be tedious and unexciting, but those services shaped my spiritual journey, even though I did not sense it at the time.

Each time I gathered with Friends for worship I was being transformed by the perpetual work of the Spirit. The quiet, consistent service was steadily shaping my idea of God. My image of God and the powerful ministry of Christ was developed by the Friends who sat in the same places each week with a Godly consistency. As I grew into adulthood, I developed a view of God that reflects my meeting's worship. The God I believe in is consistent in Grace and Truth, unwavering in Mercy, and dependable in Providence. God is not a shifting force that changes each week with the tides. Rather, my God mirrors the meeting I call home: steady, dependable, peaceful, and reliable. I appropriate God as One who brings good order to the chaos, just as my home meeting brought peace and stability to my life during many chaotic times.

It is a rare and sacred task to gather as Friends. Sometimes we are tempted to latch onto every contemporary trend and keep up with the mega-Church down the street. Often, ministers feel that they must create some sort of "feeling" or "experience" so that congregants believe the service was meaningful. In a culture that demands our senses to be heightened during every activity, meeting for worship should be the one place where we do not need to be entertained by trivial antics. We let the soap operas and politicians have their emotive pandering. As Friends we realize that worship does not need to be a dramatic, overly emotional experience. Fads come and go, and vain sentiment is fleeting, but the consistent, loving, and nurturing Presence of Christ continues to draw Friends to True, transformative worship. The Presence in the Midst can work when the same people sit in the same spot week after week. Growing up in meeting, there was a certain comfort in staring at the back of the same heads every week. In a world that seems increasingly chaotic, God can work through the subtle and consistent language of meeting for worship.

*David R. Mercadante, 29
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Invite Your Body to Worship

Let us be ready for worship.

One of my blessed elders here in my new community at Stillwater Meeting (Ohio Yearly Meeting, Conservative) told me about her resentment of the admonition to “come with heart and mind prepared”: “When I attended Olney Friends School I had cows to milk Sunday mornings—you must run to worship!” she said. “But milking cows really puts you in a rhythm. You’re attentive to the task, just being there with the udders, one squirt, two squirts, the sound on the metal bucket, that had to be preparation enough—and I think it was.”

We are so often busy in the body; there are places to be, people to see, tasks that require our attention at every moment we try to set aside. Making the space to “come with heart and mind prepared” does not always look like stillness as I once imagined.

As a child, I was silent through meeting for worship. Unlike my brother, who seemed to want to wrestle every surface or hand extended to him, I sat in my parent’s lap, on the floor, or on a friend’s lap. Was I prepared? Had I contemplated a query or centered my thoughts? The intellectual definition we assign this activity does not allow for a child, or perhaps any nonintellectual, to prepare. I trust in my wise child self—that I indeed had “heart and mind prepared,” as did my brother. Or perhaps I had body prepared? A child’s body is always prepared for its journey of worshipful discovery.

Children’s first gestures have joy and wonderment in movement before they have will. As the individuated self develops, baby bodies read and define space. Body-mind centering is one method used in dance therapy and other disciplines to recall the development of physical sensation. As you lie on the floor, one directs her attention to the different locations from which early movement originates. It is not until an advanced stage that the child reaches for an object. This shift from discovery-movement to willful movement is dramatic. In preparation for this desire-guided stage, the neck must strengthen so the head lifts easily, and the hand follows the eye’s gaze. The whole body falls into line with what the eye sees. There is a loss of wonder, in a way. Instead: reaching, acquiring, holding, owning.

Our bodies have so much to teach us. When we listen, they are offering us a constant commentary on our thoughts and actions. Nay, the body has a mind of its own. It is not just the obedient servant of the mind. Too often we treat the sacred vessel of our lives like a support system for the head. Injury and illness are reminders of the importance of caring for, maintaining, and spending loving time with our bodies. When we pretend the body is just the high-maintenance support system for the brain, we commit that sin Descartes introduced (dividing mind from body, Cartesian dualism) and, thankfully, revoked.

Let our worship affirm the unity of mind, body, and spirit. Indeed, Friends owe their name to this mystical and life-affirming connection. Did we not tremble in the presence of the Lord? And now? That would be a little embarrassing, I guess? Are we ashamed of what moving in the Spirit looks like? We say “moved by the Spirit,” but this rarely errs from the seated or standing position, chairs in a circle or lines facing one another. Were there chairs on Pendle Hill?

We are not a seated people, Friends.

Jaya Karsemeyer, 29

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Dot-to-Dot

I used to ride to “quiet meeting” on the back of my Dad’s bike. I would sit in the corner with felt-tips and Dot-to-Dot books trying to colour between the lines and not make too much noise. Later, I remember wriggling and fidgeting on the laps of friendly strangers, studying the facial expressions in the practically silent circle.

I wonder how much time I spent in that circle over the following years, in the ten minutes before creeping out to read, shout, sing, and draw in Children’s Programme. I spent that time making faces at the other kids, watching the ducks out the window, counting different types of shoes, reading books from the library trolley, asking forgiveness for having snuck a spoonful of Nutella, listening really hard to see if God would talk to me. . . .

I still remember the pride I felt the first time that I sat through a whole meeting, how nervous I was the first time that I gave a reading.

Now, after ten years of meetings, I realise how much I've changed. I still know how many beams there are across the meeting house ceiling and how many bars on the window, but I could no longer tell you the ratio of shoes to sandals or how many people had their eyes shut last Sunday.

I've been to quite a few discussions about how different people spend their time in meeting for worship, been given suggestions and things to try, but those ten minutes I have twice a month are different every time. I listen to and reflect on the readings and ministry. I breathe deeply. I admire the beautiful world out the window. I give thanks for the people who are present and think of those who are not. I try to clear my mind of daily worries. I try to focus on my feelings. Sometimes I just stare at the ticking clock waiting for it to be over. I've felt enlightened, relaxed, happy. I've made resolutions. I've come to feel a sense of peace. But I wouldn't claim to ever have cleared my mind completely or to have heard the Inner Voice.

Watching the younger children in the meeting as they wriggle and whisper, I'm reminded of how far I've come . . . and how far I have to go.

Keava McKeogh, 16

*Waikato-Hauraki Meeting, Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa/New Zealand
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Song of an Iona Pilgrimage*

Listen!

God sings

sausage-sizzle of surf-shifted sand

ah of the sea's vast sighs

wild goose wing-strokes.

Here!

our sandcastle

society suffers and grows each ferry

love enmeshes and embraces

this many-layered parcel.

See!

the Trinity

in scented sisterhood: yeast creating

aluminum conveying, cumin uplifting

scrubbing and swearing side-by-side.

Feel!

Laces of faith

firm on my booted feet

I step open-eyed into swamps

theological, metaphorical, literal, littoral.

Rhiannon Grant, 24

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*Editor's note: Iona is an ecumenical Christian community focused on peace and social justice, the rebuilding of community, and the renewal of worship. It has several locations in the United Kingdom, with the primary location on the isle of Iona, off the west coast of Scotland. This piece was written during a residence at the MacLeod Centre.

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