

WHAT DOES QUAKER SPIRITUALITY LOOK LIKE?

THE SHAPE OF QUAKER SPIRITUALITY

Looking across Quaker history, what can we say about the general shape of Quaker spirituality?

1. What have Quakers found to be true?

- i. **Inward Source of Guidance** - there is a source of guidance and transformation to be found deep within people.
- ii. **God/Spirit/Light** - This source of guidance and transformation might be called God, Spirit, Light or many other names.
- iii. **Universally Available** - all people, without exception, have this source of guidance within them.
- iv. **Inward Intimacy** - therefore, everyone can enjoy a direct and unmediated relationship with God/Spirit/Light.
- v. **Inward Transformation** - when people pay attention to the guidance of God/Spirit/Light within them it reveals their darkness and leads them to new life.
- vi. **Outward Transformation** - Inward transformation leads to a transformed outward life in the world.
- vii. **Testimony** - our 'testimony' is an outward witness to the guidance of God/Spirit/Light and how it has changed us inwardly.
- viii. **A Better World** - the guidance of God/Spirit/Light leads towards a world that is in harmonious right relationship. This might be called heaven, shalom, the peaceable Kingdom or many other names.

2. What are the Implications of this for Quaker Practice?

- i. **Corporate Worship** – a form of worship based on waiting and listening in stillness and silence that reflects the priority given to focusing on the inward source of guidance and transformation

- ii. **Individual practices** – individual spiritual practices that develop and nurture a person’s openness and sensitivity to the inward source of guidance and transformation.
- iii. **Spiritual Discernment** – discernment as an essential Quaker discipline that enables individuals and the community to carefully assess the validity of the guidance they feel they have received from God/Spirit/Light before they act on it.
- iv. **Corporate Decision-making** – a method of making decisions as a community that seeks to allow the guidance of God/Spirit/Light to determine the outcome rather than the individual wills of those involved.
- v. **Testimony** – an expectation that inward guidance and transformation will be revealed outwardly in the lives of the community and its members. Priority is generally given to right action over right belief.
- vi. **Hope** – the guidance received inwardly from God/Spirit/Light and the general shape and nature of the testimony it provokes, gives hope that a world in right relationship (heaven, shalom, the peaceable kingdom etc...) is possible and viable, despite the way the world currently appears to be.

3. How might we characterising Quaker spirituality?

It is possible to identify ten characteristics of Quaker Spirituality:

- i. **A Spirituality of Seeking** – Our tradition emerged out of a sense of dissatisfaction and a process of seeking to find a better way. Today many Friends value seeking over finding.
- ii. **A Spirituality of Intimacy** – our emphasis is on the inwardness or closeness of God/Spirit/Light and therefore the possibility of being in an intimate relationship with the divine.
- iii. **A Spirituality of Experience** – if God/Spirit/Light is close to us and we can be in an intimate relationship with the divine, then what matters most is our experience of this relationship rather than formulated beliefs about it.
- iv. **A Spirituality of Listening** – if God/Spirit/Light is close to us or within us, we need to focus on listening to what the divine is telling us/calling us to do.
- v. **A Spirituality of Guidance** – the discipline of listening assumes that God/Spirit/Light will guide us and teach us. Our focus is therefore on the guidance of the inward teacher.

- vi. **A Spirituality of Discernment** – what we hear and the guidance we receive needs to be tested. Is it from God/Spirit/Light or not? This is the discipline of spiritual discernment.
- vii. **A Spirituality of Transformation** – we expect that our experience of God/Spirit/Light, and the guidance we receive, will lead to transformation. Our lives will be changed.
- viii. **A Lived Spirituality** – if we expect divine guidance to lead to transformation, then the fruits of our spiritual experiences will be visible in our lives. We should “let our lives preach”.
- ix. **A Spirituality of the ‘Here and Now’** – if our lives can be genuinely transformed now, in this life, then there is no need to wait until death for things to be resolved. There is no time like the present.
- x. **A Spirituality of Hope** – if the possibility of transformation in this life is available to everyone then, at least in principle; heaven on earth is achievable. This is a hopeful vision.