

# Finding our way into Meeting for Worship

*Tried and tested Quaker practice*

Quaker worship, where so much is undefined or assumed, may be baffling to relative newcomers. Every meeting for worship is a new and different holy experiment, where we wait on the spirit. That means there can be no hard and fast 'rules'.

Even so, 350 years of worship have created a strong body of Quaker experience and we ourselves have found that some of the customs and practice developed over time do help to deepen worship and draw the worshipping community together. Elders have tried, however imperfectly, to outline some of this practice here.

Our hope is that this may enable everyone to feel more confident in making their own contribution, spoken, or unspoken to our experience of worship together. We would welcome your suggestions and additions.

*Silent worship and the spoken word are both parts of Quaker ministry. The ministry of silence demands the faithful activity of every member in the meeting. as, together, we enter the depths of a living silence, the stillness of God, we find one another in 'the things that are eternal', upholding and strengthening one another.*

*from*

***Quaker faith and practice 2.01***

- ❖ Beginning worship with an extended silence usually helps the Meeting to 'centre down' and allows us to free ourselves of distractions. The spontaneous ministry of babies and young children is always welcome.
  
- ❖ While occasional silent reading, e.g. *Quaker faith & practice*, can help us settle into worship, habitually reading for a significant time may separate us from fellow-worshippers and thus lessen our contribution to the centring down.
  
- ❖ We are asked to listen to all vocal ministry in an open and accepting spirit and to allow it to settle deeply into the worship before contributing anything new.
  
- ❖ Spoken ministry is very welcome. *Advices & Queries* remind us: 'do not assume that vocal ministry is never to be your part'. Even a few hesitant words may be of great service and may also call out helpful ministry from others.
  
- ❖ Before rising, we may want to ask ourselves inwardly: is my message for the meeting, or given for me personally? Does my leading come from the spirit or reflect a more secular concern, however important and passionately held?

- ❖ We are advised not to expect to offer vocal ministry every time we attend worship and not to speak twice in the same meeting.
  
- ❖ Books for spiritual reflection available in the meeting are often spontaneously and helpfully used in ministry. Experience suggests that it is not easy to integrate a ready prepared reading into the spirit of meeting for worship.
  
- ❖ Under the pressure of speaking, it is easy to forget to be audible. We all need to think of our listeners and consciously try to speak clearly, without haste, and loudly enough for everyone to hear us easily.
  
- ❖ We are asked to resist engaging contentiously with earlier ministry. When referring to earlier vocal ministry we are asked to try to avoid naming Friends, as this can unintentionally exclude those who do not know the person named.
  
- ❖ It can be helpful for the last part of Meeting to settle into renewed silence. It can also be helpful to draw the threads of the meeting together into a whole.

These things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

*Elders of Balby Meeting, 1656*

*See chapter 1 of Quaker faith and practice, especially sections 8 - 13*

*This chapter is also printed as a separate booklet, Advices and Queries*

*Quaker faith and practice sections 2.35 onwards also guide us into Quaker worship*

*There are copies of Quaker faith and practice (a red book) in the meeting room, the library or online <http://qfp.quaker.org.uk>*

This leaflet was prepared by York Friargate Meeting elders and updated in 2014