

Learning Resources 6.1

The Quaker Spiritual Journey: The Inward Work

Being Attentive and Being Guided

1. Discomfort: Becoming Aware That All is Not Well

Awakening to the spiritual pathway often begins with some form of longing, sometimes felt as dissatisfaction with the way things are. Longing remains as a strand of the pathway even after one finds a connection with God.

Marcelle Martin - *Our life is Love: The Quaker Spiritual Pathway* (p.16)

The Quaker spiritual journey usually starts with a growing sense of unease or longing. Friends find that questions arise about who they are, what they are doing, how the world works, and their place within it.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Can you identify periods in your own life when you experienced a deep sense of discomfort and a feeling that all was not well? What prompted this?
2. Has a sense of discomfort ever led to major changes in your life? What happened?

2. Paying Attention: Heeding the Promptings of Love and Truth

The function of contemplation in all its forms is to penetrate illusion and help us to touch reality. Contemplation is difficult for many of us because we have invested so much in illusion...

Parker J. Palmer - *The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring* (p.25)

The first step on the Quaker spiritual journey is a willingness to be still, to adopt a state of quiet attentiveness and deep listening, to become aware of what the Light is revealing within.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In what circumstances are you most likely to gain fresh and unexpected insights? Can you give an example?
2. Can you think of a time when you suddenly became aware of the promptings of love and truth in your heart? What was going on?

3. Diagnosis: Seeing What the Light Reveals

Those who repeatedly turn to the divine Presence within are made increasingly sensitive to deception, oppression, and injustice in behaviors that had previously been seen as normal and unchangeable... Openings that show us how the ways of the world are not in harmony

with God's desires for justice, love, and peace often lead us into the next element of the spiritual journey.

Marcelle Martin - Our life is Love: The Quaker Spiritual Pathway (p.54, 57)

One of the first things Quakers notice when committing themselves to a discipline of paying attention is that what the Light reveals about them and about the world is rarely comforting.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Can you think of a time when you suddenly became aware that something about your life needed to change? What happened?
2. How do you feel about the idea that the work of the Light is like the diagnosis of a doctor? In what sense do we need someone else or a higher power to do this diagnosing?

4. Awakening: Gaining a New Vision

What the Light reveals to us changes the quality of our being. The seed of the new creation is "raised up" in us. We feel compelled to act differently.

Douglas Gwyn - *A Sustainable Life: Quaker Faith and Practice in the Renewal of Creation* (p.3)

By moving beyond denial to honest acceptance, people begin to see with new eyes and act with fresh clarity and purpose. Their growing sensitivity to inward guidance can bring a whole new vision of themselves and the world.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Can you think of a time when your experience of inward guidance brought a new way of understanding something? Where did this lead you?
2. What is your experience of becoming more sensitive to the suffering and injustice in the world? What are the challenges in responding to this?

Learning Resources 6.2

The Quaker Spiritual Journey: The Testing

Being Discerning

5. Discernment: Sorting and Testing Motivations

Learning to separate impulses and feelings from the guidance of the Inward Light is at the core of the discernment that comes with spiritual maturity. How do I recognize the voice of the Light? What sound does the Spirit make pushing on my heart?

Margery Post Abbott - *To Be Broken and Tender: A Quaker Theology for Today* (p.58)

A crucial feature of the Quaker spiritual journey, one that provides the essential link between the inward and outward life, is the discipline of discernment, which is about examining inner motivations, distinguishing between true and false leadings, and identifying the right path to follow.

Quaker group discernment and decision-making rely upon the faith that our different personalities can be reconciled and brought into peaceful unity in the light of God's love.

Douglas Gwyn - *A Sustainable Life: Quaker Faith and Practice in the Renewal of Creation* (p.78)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. When you think about the big decisions you have made in your life, to what extent were these tested by a conscious process of discernment? Do you tend to be naturally impulsive or cautious?
2. Have you taken time to think about the impact of your upbringing and socialisation on the way you respond to issues and decisions? What could you do to become more Spirit-led and discerning in your life?

Learning Resources 6.3

The Quaker Spiritual Journey: The Outward Work

Being Adventurous & Being Faithful

6. New Life: Taking a Different Path

...the inner and outward being are integrally related, with the actions and activities of the outward being reflecting the individual's true inward spiritual condition. We also know from personal experience that the relationship works in the other direction as well: what we do outwardly often shapes or changes our spiritual condition.

Lloyd Lee Wilson - *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order* (p.181)

Living adventurously and being willing to take a different path can lead to a new way of life based on fresh perceptions, reconciled relationships, and a growing sense of liberation and wholeness.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What has the decision to take a new path meant in your life? Was this prompted by a single momentous event, or was it revealed more slowly over time?
2. What kinds of fresh concerns and activities have emerged for you and how have these helped shape a new direction in your life?

7. Testimony: Being Patterns and Examples

So the outward practices that form our testimony not only express our inner convictions. They also add further clarity to that conviction. The inward and the outward continue to inform and advance one another as we "live up to the light" we have been given.

Douglas Gwyn. *A Sustainable Life: Quaker Faith and Practice in the Renewal of Creation* (p.42)

The final stage of the Quaker spiritual journey is developing a commitment to being faithful, finding the courage and resolve to act on the inward guidance that has been received and discerned. The visible manifestation of this action in the world is what Friends call testimony.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What do you think your life and conduct communicates to others? What messages does the Quaker community convey in its witness?
2. Can you think of a time when someone else's words or actions had a significant impact on your life? What were the implications?

8. Faithfulness: Steadfast Commitment to Love and truth

Following a leading of any sort generally requires some aspect of self-control, self-denial, or challenge that invites us to “die to ourselves” and live into the ways of God and Christ. Leadings ask us to give our energy and resources to God’s projects rather than those of our own devising.

Marcelle Martin - *Our life is Love: The Quaker Spiritual Pathway* (p.129)

Acting faithfully on guidance received and discerned is not easy. Being led by the Spirit to interrupt and resist dominant assumptions and ways of living may well bring people into conflict both with the powers that be, and with their friends and neighbours. Can we find the courage needed to act faithfully?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In trying to be faithful, does “the fear of seeming peculiar” to others sometimes hold you back (Advices & Queries 38)? How do you handle this in the various areas of your life?
2. How do you seek to be faithful in the small things on a day-to-day basis? Does this help you to face more significant challenges when they come along?

9. New Creation: Participating in the Rule of Love and Truth

We are called to live in the New Creation, a life lived in accord with the Beatitudes and other teachings of Jesus. A life of simplicity and integrity evidences a life transformed so thoroughly that neither greed, nor fear, nor the opinions of popular culture remain central. In such lives, in such communities, the Light shines so clearly that the City of God becomes visible.

Margery Post Abbott - *To Be Broken and Tender: A Quaker Theology for Today* (p.100)

Across history, Quakers have been inspired and motivated by a vision of a renewed creation, a world under the rule of love, justice and harmony, rather than hatred, injustice and destructiveness. They have envisaged a world where humans recognise and celebrate diversity and complexity, live in harmony with the rest of creation, and heal divisions.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What hopes and expectations help to give a positive impetus to your life? Do you find it easy or hard to keep this positive focus?
2. In what ways might love and truth be regarded as stronger and more enduring than hatred and deceit? What gives you a sense of hope in these times?

Being Reflective

10. Fresh Insights: A Review

The key stages of the Quaker spiritual Journey might appear to be a linear process, taking a straight and direct route from the experience of discomfort to the discovery of a new creation. In reality, of course, the way is far more complicated and nuanced. The Journey seems to twist and turn and constantly doubles back on itself.

Every stage of the process and every circuit of the Journey brings fresh revelations and new opportunities for learning, not just from fellow travellers, but also from mistakes made and obstacles encountered. So, there is a constant need to be taken back to the inward work of being attentive and being guided as the essential root and ground of this spiritual Journey. The Journey stretches out before us, and we keep moving on with hope and expectation.

Questions for Reflection

1. In what way is the Quaker spiritual journey linear, spiralling, or cyclical? What makes most sense to you?
2. Having reflected on the ten stages of the Quaker spiritual journey, does it reflect your own life experience? What resonances and dissonances have you noticed?