

Waiting And Resting In The True Silence

Three Essays From
Friends Bulletin



THE QUAKER UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP

...is composed of seekers, mainly, but not exclusively members of the Religious Society of Friends. QUF seeks to promote open dialogue on its issues of interest. It writes in its statement of purpose:

While being convinced of the validity of our own religious paths, we not only accept but rejoice that others find validity in their spiritual traditions, whatever they may be. Each of us must find his or her own path, and each of us can benefit for the search of others.

In the selection of both its speakers and manuscripts, QUF tries to implement those ideas.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Strangers or newcomers to Quaker worship repeatedly ask: "What do you do in silent meetings?" Even some long-time attenders remain doubtful. In this pamphlet we present answers from three Friends, all writing from a universalist perspective. The pieces first appeared in *Friends Bulletin* for September, 2001, and they are used here by permission, along with a brief introduction from *Bulletin* editor Anthony Manousos.

The authors are all West Coast Friends. Margery Post Abbott, a member of Multnomah Monthly Meeting in Portland, Oregon, is well known for her ministry among Friends and for her books and lectures. Readers of *Universalist Friends* will recall her essay on "Identity," which appeared in Number 30 (Spring, 1998). The full text of her talk at Intermountain Yearly Meeting, of which the present piece is a condensation, has also been published by the Wider Quaker Fellowship. Lanny Jay is from the Redwood Forest Friends Meeting, and W. Norman Cooper from the Ojai Meeting, both in California.

We are especially indebted to Anthony Manousos for his cooperation and help in preparing this pamphlet.

Rhoda R. Gilman

INTRODUCTION

By Anthony Manousos

When I first attended Quaker meeting in Princeton, NJ, I was deeply impressed with the awesome quality of silent worship. The Stillness seemed all the more impressive because we met in an 18th century meetinghouse in the midst of an old-growth forest. The only sounds were the crackling of the fire in the old stone fireplace, the occasional creaking of oak floors, and birds chirping and breezes blowing through the trees. It was as if we had stepped backwards in time, or rather entered into timelessness.

The silence was impressive, but the vocal ministry left something to be desired. Hardly anyone spoke. And when someone did, it was usually a brief message lacking in eloquence. I began to wonder if it might make sense for me to attend the early-bird Quaker worship service at 9:00 AM and then slip away to the nearby Presbyterian church, which had an intellectually challenging and dynamic preacher. That way I could have “the best of both worlds” – the quietism of the Quakers, and the eloquence of the Presbyterians.

As I sat in the silence pondering what to do, an inner Voice spoke – or rather whispered: “Do you wish to know Me, or do you wish to hear sermons about Me?”

It was clear what I needed to do. I needed to learn how to “rest in the True Silence” and to stop judging vocal ministry by merely human standards. I also needed to avoid sermons until it was clear that I was being led to them by a Higher Power, not by a desire for intellectual stimulation.

In the following three articles Friends reflect upon what meeting for worship has meant to them. In her keynote address to Intermountain Yearly Meeting, Margery Abbott speaks of worship in terms of “brokenness” and healing. She describes how language and theological assumptions

can be hurtful and how we need to be “tender” towards others seeking to live in the Truth. She helps to translate old Quaker concepts into contemporary language and concepts. Reflecting on the essentially ineffable quality of Quaker worship, Lanny Jay invokes a Hindu practice – the mantra – as a way to center the mind. Norm Cooper focuses on the unexpectedly liberating experience of Spirit-led vocal ministry.

“A TENDER, BROKEN MEETING”

By Margery Post Abbott

“A Tender, Broken Meeting” is one way 17th century Friends described what we might call a “Gathered Meeting” or even a “Covered Meeting” – a time when the Eternal Presence was felt strongly in the midst of worship, connecting everyone in the room in a deep fellowship before God. This experience was transforming and often difficult to face as individuals saw their own failings reflected in the Truth, as well as experiencing love, hope, and unity.

Early Friends had a distinctive language of faith which was rich and full. They have taught me much about the work of the Light in my own heart as well as what it means to be a Friend. What follows addresses the language of faith and some of what it can teach us about growing in Spirit, enriching our lives and making us beacons for hope in the world.

LISTENING TO WORDS

Words are so full of meanings which are dependent on their context, the speaker and the hearer. In our Meetings, when we attempt to speak about the Holy One and our spiritual lives, the process becomes even more complicated. We may find individuals who look to Judaism, Buddhism, or the Christian Testament for their inspiration. Others see themselves as Wiccans or Universalists or agnostics.

What we encounter in Meeting for Worship is beyond all words. Yet words are essential to our human communities. We all know how words can shut down communication as well as open up rich connections. Words can point to possibilities or they can harm others. All too often we do not know how words truly affect the people we are speaking to.

For example, a friend of mine once told me about having had a transforming mystical experience. This experience was such a strong in-breaking of the Spirit into her life, and the potential change so significant, that she sought the help of her Meeting. She was deeply hurt and left the Meeting with a broken heart when no one could understand what she was saying and no one was willing to simply listen.

I had the opposite experience, that of tenderness. When God broke open the hard, protective shell around my heart and called me to transformation, someone was present who sat with me afterwards, listened to me, and gently spoke to my condition. Later, others agreed to meet with me regularly as I learned words that might express something of the inward change I knew – words which helped birth the Spirit in me and create the ministry I am now living.

The women who sat with me each had their own language of faith and included one evangelical Christian. As I found my own way, I came to know that their languages were not mine. However, by our willingness to be tender towards one another in the Spirit, we each came to terms with the difficult words, as well as the helpful ones, that the others used. This experience thus became a valuable process of healing and growth for all of us. Within our unprogrammed Meetings, as we speak of our faith, we inevitably learn that we believe things that others experience as truly painful or difficult to hear. My concern is about finding words to express our faith and the ways we might heal and grow as individuals and as meetings.

Confronting fears and misconceptions can be a lifelong task. To listen fully to other Friends speak about who they are requires that we be open to being changed ourselves. To be open at such a fundamental and vulnerable level as that of faith is frightening in itself. Few of us welcome the prospect of change.

The change in me involved personal friendships, regular confrontations with the living faith of other Friends, and God's arm around me showing me another way to be. The process will be different for each of us.

We profess to be open to every person finding their own relationship with the divine. In reality, we all too often have an unspoken agreement that Christian language, in particular, is not acceptable.

We have good reason to be respectful of those among us who have had painful experiences in the church of their childhood, but we too rarely know how to help heal those wounds. We show respect for other faith traditions but are often uncomfortable with the fact that much we admire about Quakerism came from people who knew Christ Jesus risen and alive in their hearts.

Coming to terms with Christian language is, however, valuable in our unprogrammed meetings. So many of us have people in our lives who are evangelical Christians and find it difficult to talk with them. Others were hurt by childhood experiences in the church. When old anger from these wounds spills out at the wrong time, it can and has been destructive to our meeting communities.

Learning to hear Christian language within Quaker tradition is a three-step process. First, is to become aware of the meanings used elsewhere in the church and let go of old feelings about the way these words are sometimes used or misused. Second, is to consider how early Friends used these terms and what useful concepts they might bring to us today. The third step comes as we integrate this understanding into a recognition of which words we can simply hear without rancor and which words can be useful in service to our community – healing old wounds rather than simply leaving raw scars.

A FEW WORDS WHICH POINT THE WAY TO GROWTH

The old Quaker doctrine of Perfection says much to me. This kind of perfection is not about doing everything exactly right. What early Friends knew as perfection was really a process of becoming whole: of learning that each one of us is dearly loved by God and can grow in our ability to love those around us, enemies as well as friends.

Early Friends offer other words which help me to speak about the process of becoming whole so that God's unconditional love might shine in us and through us.

- * Be still and cool in thy own mind – wait, attend
- * The Seed
- * Taking up the Cross daily
- * The New Creation
- * Retirement and opportunities
- * Broken and tender meetings

Together, these words teach us much about being healed and whole so that we might come to live more fully in the world but not of it, and with humility let go of our self-identification with the materialistic values of the world.

BE STILL AND COOL IN THY OWN MIND – WAIT, ATTEND

We can learn to listen for the still, small voice of God within, whether we are speaking of meeting for worship or our all-too-busy daily lives. Early Friends had several ways of expressing this kind of listening with the inward ear and seeing with the inner eye: Be Still and Cool in Thy Own Mind – Wait, Attend.

The reminders are constant in old writings: stop your own headstrong attempts to control your relationship with God. Rather, wait upon God and trust the Inward Light, the Inward Teacher and Guide, to lead, sometimes by unexpected means and using surprising people.

These words of early Friends grew out of their deep knowledge of the Bible. They are words that might open our

hearts and beings to the Truth which both embraces Christianity and extends well beyond Christianity.

THE SEED

If I were a Yogi, I would seek samadhi, or transcendence. If I were Buddhist, I would work to achieve Nirvana. But I am not. I am a Quaker, a Friend. Thus I seek to be perfect: to be whole, to love fully as I am loved. Thus, I seek to truly know and respond to “that of God” in myself and in each person I encounter.

The phrase “that of God in everyone” is widely used today, but I’ve heard many people express frustration with it. To speak instead of “the Seed” makes clear an expectation of growth. The Seed within is to be nurtured and attended to or else it risks becoming stunted or even dying. As Isaac Pennington so vividly described, the Seed sends forth tender shoots like young, green corn. Yet no matter how carefully we may sit and watch, the shoot does not seem to grow. The growth becomes clear only over days and weeks and months.

Early Friends saw this growth as “becoming more like Christ.” We may more often speak of “becoming more fully ourselves.” But, I like the earlier way for a couple of reasons. One is that I know Christ as an eternal source of love, truth, energy, hope and renewal. And second, my own experience of growth has taken me in unexpected directions and touched on potential I had no idea was present. I had in the past sought to “become more fully myself” only to learn that my concept of myself was too limited and the result was stifling rather than freeing. Only when I let go of my own concept of who I was, was I able to truly come into myself.

TAKING UP THE CROSS DAILY

Buddhists acknowledge that suffering is endemic in this world. The First Noble Truth is that suffering, pain and sorrow are part of this world, a suffering which also includes

impermanence, insubstantiality and imperfection. But this is only an acknowledgment so that we might not be trapped by and in our ignorance and pain. Only then is true liberation possible.

Early Friends also saw clearly the pain and suffering in the world, knowing how easily we can be trapped in this. In the Cross, they did not see some abstract, distant sacrifice to atone for our sins. The Cross was a measure of God suffering with us and for us, lifting our pain and burdens so that we might be free.

To take up the Cross daily was once an essential part of being a Friend, a part we all too often forget. To share the pain of the world consciously with Christ is part of growing in perfection and living a life of faithfulness. The Cross also symbolized the struggle of the “creature” or “the flesh” – the self-will – the part of us which resists the leadings of the Light. So, in some sense, to take up the Cross is similar to the Buddhist desire for self-emptying and knowing that neither pain nor desire need control our lives.

Faithfulness to God’s way in service of others is integral to the way of the Cross. We most often speak of this way in terms of our testimonies to peace, simplicity, integrity, equality and community. The inward experience holds Truth as it becomes reflected in the way we live and the way we treat other people, all creatures, and this ball of earth we live on.

No matter what our circumstances, we always have a choice to let generosity flow and to notice the joy present in even the most difficult situations. The Cross is thus about renewal, hope and the cycles of life.

THE NEW CREATION

One of George Fox’s great openings came when he “rose up through the flaming sword” into the paradise of God, and “all creation had a new smell.” With this, he rejected all

the old teaching that we are trapped in sin until some future coming of Christ. We can know and live in God's New Creation here on earth. When we attend to the Light, when we nurture the Seed within, and take up the Cross, we can come into unity with all creation and with God.

In this New Creation – which is sometimes referred to as the Kingdom of God on earth, or the City of God – people will live in peace with one another, without being dominated by greed, envy, fear or hatred. The world celebrated in the Sermon on the Mount will become a reality.

Friends' testimonies, our business method, our worship, and the way our meetings are organized all grow out of this experience of the New Creation realized among us today.

RETIREMENT

Do we take time away from the press of society, the demands of peace and justice concerns, the obligations of the workplace, and even our family? The word retirement can call us to a time of refreshment, not the end of our work. This may be as simple as a period of meditation in the early morning or before we go to bed. It may involve reading to our children from books we find inspiring and which speak of the Holy One shining through into the world.

Making retirement part of life includes times of retreat – personal retreats especially where one can take a day or a few days alone, in the quiet, to renew inwardly. Similarly, when I take time to write in my journal at the start of the day, or sit quietly and clear my mind, the whole day goes much better.

Simply taking time to hold a centering word in our hearts or finding “opportunities” to worship spontaneously with others in the midst of the on-rushing flow of our days can offer surprising perspectives and give us a chance to shift gears and become more transparent to the Light.

TENDER AND BROKEN

Early Quaker Journals often described worship as “broken” and “tender.” When hearts were tender, people had been open to the work of the Spirit among them. Meetings were rich when many were “broken” – when the demands of human lust, greed, fear and selfishness broke and gave way to the leadings of the Light.

Sitting in the silence is not an easy thing. Anyone who has tried it for long can attest to the huge range of thoughts which come unbeckoned. In the silence we can give in to negative thoughts or we can nurture the Seed within, allowing the Spirit to release the power which anger, or pain, or fear, or bitterness holds over our lives.

In meeting for worship, it is sometimes all too easy to be offended by a spoken ministry. As we come to be tender, we are more aware that messages in worship may not be for us personally, but may be very meaningful for someone else. Even at the moments when a person may not be speaking from the Spirit, we can quietly accept this and let it pass without it damaging the time of worship. We can focus on listening for the voice of the Infinite in the silence and in the people around us. The Light may break into our hearts as we listen and our lives take on a new texture. A hard layer of resistance or fear deep inside might break open in the silence, allowing new growth.

When we are whole, we are not as easily threatened by words we disagree with and we have less need to control what happens around us. We can hold ourselves and the world more lightly and more joyfully. We can come to be present to the moment, and learn to allow our minds and bodies to be responsive to the Source as well as our hearts and souls.

ON BECOMING BROKEN AND TENDER MEETINGS

I recently had lunch with a woman who has not been active in my meeting for several years. She spoke more softly this time, but I could still hear the bitterness she felt when people criticized her for speaking about her love for Jesus in Worship. The wound is slowly healing, but she is not yet ready to return to meeting. Yet I also miss a man who was part of our meeting when I first came to Portland, then resigned his membership because our meeting was “too Christian” in his eyes and had no place for his atheism.

The language of faith can be the most difficult language a person can learn. It can open us to others in a way which leaves us vulnerable, or we can hide behind it as if it were armor, or even use it as a weapon of attack. When others use difficult language, we can respond in anger or we can be challenged to understand more of other people, ourselves and God.

Can we learn to be at least bilingual? This is one of the challenges for all Friends today. If someone asks you: “Are You Saved?” What is your response? Do you get angry and declare “How can you ask such a question!!!” Do you take some deep breaths and empty your mind? Are you present to that person and what they are saying? I have had people ask me that question quite seriously, concerned for my soul if I don’t accept Jesus. But I have also had people ask it in a broad manner, wanting to know if I am right with the universe no matter what my faith. And I’ve had people ask me that to tease me and see how I respond.

“Are you saved?” and the phrase which I like to use, “How is the Spirit with Thee, Friend?” are both honest questions growing out of personal faith. How they are asked may indicate priorities in a person’s life, but when we type-cast people because of this, or give rote answers, we only show our own lack of trust in the Spirit.

So what does it mean to be perfect? to be whole? to be

healed? to know unconditional love and come more and more to love unconditionally? This is the unusual kind of perfection which early Friends were convinced was possible

* It is a state of being attentive to the Spirit, the Inward Guide, Teacher, and Comforter.

* It is a transforming process of nurturing the Seed within your soul. This Seed will bring forth fruits of patience, truth, love, joy, peace, generosity, faithfulness and self-control.

* As the Seed grows, old wounds are healed and old pains lose their control over our lives. We may then come to willingly take up the Cross. As we face the sometimes overwhelming and horrible realities of the world with the support of the Unseen Power that guides us, we then have the power to choose to live in ways so that we will not inflict more suffering on others and we will ease, as we are able, the injustices and pain which others face. In this we live out of that deep, eternal peace within our souls and convey hope to the world.

* In attending to this Seed within, we come to live out God's New Creation here on earth, a place where peace is possible, justice is known, mercy is abundant and humility governs.

* In our work and the huge demands of our busy lives, can we stop from time to time for periods of retirement? As we pay attention to our own well-being, and place our hopes and fears in the hands of the Spirit, we can be refreshed and renewed to continue our work with new energy and a clearer perspective.

As more and more of us grow into wholeness, we become more tender towards one another. The hard shells around our hearts are broken by the Holy One and we come to find community, support and right relationships with each other and with the Source. As we grow in the Spirit, we come to know ourselves as part of a tender and broken meeting.

THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE OF WORSHIP

By Lanny Jay

There is a school of thought which holds that one's mystical experience of the Divine is not to be expressed in words, for words cannot do justice to transcendent experience, nor should the recipient of such experience presume to share with others a gift which she or he has received from the Source of spiritual enlightenment. Adhering to this school of thought, I have shared my mystical experience of Quaker meeting for worship only with my life partner – with one other exception.

The exception was a retreat weekend at Ben Lomond Quaker Center. One of that weekend's exercises involved drawing our experience of meeting for worship. Using just two crayons, I dutifully drew the requested picture. As fate (read: the Divine) would have it, as I explained my drawing to the small group, Madge Seaver, who must have then been in her early 70s happened by. Hearing the explanation of my picture, Madge shot me a look which said, "Friend, this we do not discuss."

While I can't know for sure what was in her mind, I know that I knew that I was crossing a line when discussing my drawing, and I have never forgotten being elderd by that look she gave me.

In keeping with that experience, here I seek not to delineate what the mystical experience of meeting for worship has been for me or is for others, but only to share the fact that many Friends have experiences, and do experience, meeting for worship as an essentially mystical event.

To make out this case, I turn first to George Fox, who,

in one sentence, managed to instruct Friends on how to approach meeting for worship and encapsulate meeting's transcendent nature. To have an experience of the knowledge and strength of the Divine we need only, in Fox's words, "Be still in thy own mind and spirit from they own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou will receive his strength and power from whence life comes, to allay all tempests, against blusterings and storms."¹

For Fox then, the approach to worship was quite simple, while the gift to be found there is of almost unimaginable consequence. In this understanding of meeting for worship Fox was not alone among early Friends. Francis Howgill found that "There was something revealed in me ... so I waited, and many things opened in me ... and then the perfect gift I received."²

That Quakerism is essentially mystical is not a new idea. For example, in a 1924 lecture entitled "The Inner Light," Gerald Kenway Hibbert told his Swarthmore Lecture audience:

Every religious system has its "Quakers" - those who turn from the outward and the legal and the institutional, and focus their attention on the Divine that is within. There is much fellowship between Friends and mystics of other systems.... The mystics of the world everywhere join hands. Their spirits leap together in a flash of joyous recognition - in the great deeps they find their unity and their abiding home³

Being mystics and at the same time rooted in Christianity, Fox and other early Quakers identified the Inner Light as the "Light of Christ." Friends made this identification because they perceived Jesus' life as a life fully illuminated

by the Inner Light. Yet, from the earliest days of the Society of Friends, Quakers understood that “the Light which was before the earth was”⁴ is neither exclusively Christian, nor is it of one or another religion. Rather, “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” as the sometimes-called Quaker Gospel puts it (John 1:9), is, according to Beatrice Saxon Snell,

“the free gift of God to every one of us, not only to Christians but to every living soul. Each man, woman or child who sets himself to obey the prompting of truth and love is making use of the Inner Light, whatever name he may give it.”⁵

A pure principle which unites mystics of whatever tradition, and an Inner Light which belongs to no tradition but is available to all – or at least to all who wait upon the Divine in silence with open hearts and attentive minds. Sound familiar? It was John Woolman, whose Journal attests to his belief in a “pure spirit which inwardly moves upon the heart” that waits in silent worship, who summed this all up when he wrote that:

There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath had different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any, where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever they become brethren.⁶

Just as many Friends experience meeting for worship as an essentially mystical event, so too, many Friends lack such an experience of meeting. Robert Griswold, last year’s Brinton Visitor, suggests that an “experience of the Light

requires discipline – the discipline of waiting.” Yet he also warns, “The Light isn’t something we obtain. It is something that obtains us to its service.”⁷ And Chris Ravndal, a resident teacher at Pendle Hill, warns that Roman Catholic contemplative traditions view mystical experiences as potentially dangerous “gifts.” They are potentially dangerous because, while given “of God for our encouragement or edification,” these gifts “can distract us from the real goal, [as] what was given as an encouragement to one who is actually spiritually immature can be taken as a confirmation of spiritual superiority.”⁸

Whether posing danger to the “spiritually immature,” or requiring discipline and then bending the recipient to its will, the mystical experience of meeting for worship requires a deep centering of one’s mind upon the Divine. To achieve this, I use a mantra. Not a mantra given to me by a spiritual teacher or guide; rather, a self-given mantra which resonates with my sense of the purpose of my life. A mantra which is mine and which, when silently repeated during meeting for worship, has served me quite well. Some Friends use a short Biblical passage or a Buddhist prayer to achieve the same end with similar success.

Yet experiencing meeting for worship as a mystical event is not an end to be sought or a goal to be achieved. Rather, it is a means, it is a path to knowledge and service (for knowledge is meaningless unless put to use), and it is a way to serve without losing faith or burning out. For Friends, the importance of knowing the mystical nature of our form of worship is to be found in the community of worshipers and in their mutual support and collective achievements. Thus, regarding the nature and significance of Quaker meeting for worship, Robert Barclay could unapologetically declare:

As iron sharpeneth iron, the seeing of the faces one of another when both are inwardly gathered into the life, giveth occasion for the life secretly to rise and pass from vessel to vessel. And as many candles lighted and put in one place do greatly augment the light and make it more to shine forth, so when many are gathered together into the same life, there more of the glory of God and his powers appears, to the refreshment of each individual.⁹

So, Friends, with my eyes closed and my attention focused upon that deep place to which (all praise to Allah) my mantra regularly transports me, I look forward to seeing your candle “augment the light and make it more to shine forth.” And after meeting for worship, as the old Quaker joke has it and Robert Griswold entreats us to remember, is when the service begins.

Notes

- 1 *Faith and Practice of Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends: A Quaker Guide to Christian Discipline*, (San Francisco, CA: Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1985 ed.) p. 85.
- 2 *Faith and Practice*, p. 84.
- 3 Martha Dart, *To Meet at the Source*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet No. 289, p. 7.
- 4 George Fox, *Epistle 49*.
- 5 *To Meet at the Source*, p. 11.
- 6 Phillips P. Moulton, ed., *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 2000), p. 236.
- 7 Robert Griswold, "Authority and Discipline Among Friends of Truth," *Friends Bulletin*, July 2000, p. 4.
- 8 Chris Ravndal, "A Friendly Approach to Centering Prayer," in *Friends Bulletin*, March, 2000, p. 16.
- 9 *Faith and Practice*, p. 86.

VOCAL MINISTRY

By W Norman Cooper

How vividly I remember the first time I attended a Quaker First Day Meeting about thirty-five years ago. When I entered the meetinghouse, I was given a typewritten sheet, which stated, "Do not speak unless God prompts you to speak. Be sure to speak if God prompts you."

I was later to learn that these simple statements summarize the greatness and simplicity of a Quaker meeting. The main purpose is to find unity in silence, which is only broken audibly by the prompting of God.

The purpose of a Quaker meeting is not to provide a means for the sharing of one's religious views or for the pleading for support for some political cause. A Quaker meeting is provided so that those attending may come together in divinely inspired silence.

Through the years, I have come to find that God-prompted vocal sharing is not a long dissertation on some subject. Rather, vocal ministry is more apt to be short so that those present can return to their silence as soon as possible.

In silence, there is unity and power. I remember an experience that occurred when I was working at the Pasadena office of the American Friends Service Committee. There had been a press attack on the pacifist stand of the American Friends Service Committee. A meeting of the employees was called to see what should be done about the situation. As the discussion continued, it became clear that there were two quite different views as to how the situation should be handled. Each side felt that it was right and argued for its point of view. Finally, the clerk of the meeting said, "It's time for the silence."

Gradually, God-prompted silence took over. Not a word was spoken. Out of the silence, quite a different way of handling the situation came to me. Then I heard the clerk of the meeting say, “I feel that the consensus of the meeting is...” and he presented the exact solution that God had given to me. Amazingly, in the silence, everyone was guided by God to this same conclusion.

This experience is an example of how god-inspired silence works. Even though not a word was spoken, the silence brought forth a solution. How alert we should be not to be tricked into stopping the silence by sharing our personal religious or political views. This does not mean that we should not give voice to our God-inspired unfoldments. We need short God-inspired messages, but these should be prompted by the silence gained in the meeting.

God does not speak to us at our meetings through the “wind, earthquake or fire” or through human reason, but through the “still, small voice” of the Spirit (*1 Kings 19:11-12*). When this inward voice is heard by anyone in the meeting, he or she should speak. Ideally, vocal ministry should always be the by-product of listening to God’s still, small voice.