

References

John Senior

QUESTIONS:

- (a) Is meditation distinguishable from 'Worship'?
- (b) Is meditation an acceptable practice for 'Worship'?

F&P 26.12 Geoffrey Hubbard, 1974

So one approaches, by efforts which call for the deepest resources of one's being, to the condition of true silence; not just of sitting still, not just of not speaking, but of a wide awake, fully aware non-thinking. It is in this condition, found and held for a brief instant only, that I have experienced the existence of something other than 'myself'. The thinking me has vanished, and with it vanishes the sense of separation, of unique identity. One is not left naked and defenceless, as one is, for example, by the operations of the mind in self-analysis. One becomes instead aware, one is conscious of being a participant in the whole of existence, not limited to the body or the moment... It is in this condition that one understands the nature of the divine power, its essential identity with love, in the widest sense of that much misused word.

Advices and Queries

1. Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.

3. Do you try to set aside times of quiet for openness to the Holy Spirit? All of us need to find a way into silence which allows us to deepen our awareness of the divine and to find the inward source of our strength. Seek to know an inward stillness, even amid the activities of daily life. Do you encourage in yourself and in others a habit of dependence on God's guidance for each day? Hold yourself and others in the Light, knowing that all are cherished by God. encourage in yourself and in others a habit of dependence on God's guidance for each day? Hold yourself and others in the Light, knowing that all are cherished by God.

F&P 21.65 James Nayler

Art thou in the Darkness? Mind it not, for if thou dost it will fill thee more, but stand still and act not, and wait in patience till Light arises out of Darkness to lead thee. Art thou wounded in conscience? Feed not there, but abide in the Light which leads to Grace and Truth, which teaches to deny, and puts off the weight, and removes the cause, and brings saving health to Light.

George Fox's 1658 letter to Lady Elizabeth Claypole - excerpts

Friend,

Be still and cool in your own mind and spirit from your own thoughts, and then you will feel the principle of God to turn your mind to the Lord God, from whom life comes; whereby you may receive his strength and power to allay all blusterings, storms, and tempests.

This is the word of the Lord God to you all; what the light exposes and discovers, as temptations, distractions, confusions; do not look at the temptations, confusions, corruptions; but at the light

which discovers them and exposes them; and with the same light you may feel over them, to receive power to stand against them. The same light which lets you see sin and transgression, will let you see the covenant of God, which blots out your sin and transgression, which gives victory and dominion over it, and brings into covenant with God. For looking down at sin, corruption, and distraction, you are swallowed up in it; but looking at the light, which discovers them, you will see over them. That will give victory, and you will find grace and strength; there is the first step to peace.

William Penn in 'No Cross, No Crown', 1682

The way, like the cross, is spiritual: that is, an inward submission of the soul to the will of God, as it is manifested by the light of Christ in the consciences of men, though it be contrary to their own inclinations. For example: when evil presents, that which shows the evil does also tell them they should not yield to it; and if they close with its counsel, it gives them power to escape it. But they that look and gaze upon the temptation, at last fall in with it, and are overcome by it; the consequence of which is guilt and judgment.

Exploring stillness: Non-theist Quakerism and Meditation Trevor Bending

QUESTIONS:

1. What do you understand as a Quaker, and otherwise, by 'Spirit' (or Spirituality)?
2. Do you think a form of meditation (EwL, Centring Prayer, Christian meditation, TM, Zen etc.) might be useful to you (or have you already found it useful)?
3. A&Q 3. Do you try to set aside times of quiet for openness to the Holy Spirit? - How do you interpret this as a nontheist?

The Simple Meditation (above - Joanna Godfrey Wood) reads:

- Sit comfortably and close your eyes or adopt a soft gaze.
- Pause all everyday thoughts.
- Go within to your centre.
- Find the place where everything is still.
- Stay in this place until you know it fully.
- Emerge.
- Move forward with your day.

In my 8-10 minutes I will refer again to 'In search of stillness' and to 'Christian Meditation; Experiencing the presence of God' by James Finley SPCK/Harper Collins 2004 and my nontheist take on it. I may also refer to Jennifer Kavanagh's 'Practical Mystics' (Quaker Quicks 2018) Chap 1. Mysticism and her reference to 'nontheistic interpretation' and quote from Evelyn Underhill (p9):

'Mysticism is the art of union with Reality. The mystic is one who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.'

I may also mention TM (Transcendental Meditation) and ask John about Rex Ambler's Experiment with Light.

I give here for reference James Finley's final 7 Chapter titles:

8. Present, Open, and Awake
9. Sit Still
10. Sit Straight
11. Slow, Deep Natural Breathing
12. Eyes Closed or Lowered Toward the Ground
13. Walking Meditation (features a zimmer frame TB)
14. Compassion

Some online links;

<https://cac.org/about/our-teachers/james-finley/>

The Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) and Richard Rohr: <https://cac.org/about/who-we-are/>

The World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) and John Main (formerly of Ealing Abbey) with Laurence Freeman OSB <https://wccm.org/about/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scholarly_approaches_to_mysticism#Mystical_experience

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contemplation> - on (Christian) Contemplation

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_contemplation - Christian mysticism/
Contemplation

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_meditation - Christian meditation (to see the difference)

<https://mediomedia.com/collections/learning-to-meditate> (WCCM Christian - books etc)

<https://experiment-with-light.org.uk/>
(see Rex Ambler 'Light to live by - an exploration in Quaker spirituality' Quaker Books 2002/2008 ISBN978 0 85245 336 0
and 'Truth of the Heart - an anthology of George Fox' Quaker Books 2001)

<https://uk.tm.org/> Transcendental meditation - UK

<https://www.tm.org/> (USA)

https://livingspirit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/EVENTS_Oct-Dec_23.pdf (St. James's, Piccadilly)

<https://livingspirit.org.uk/>

<https://www.sjp.org.uk/groups/deep-abiding-prayer/> (Deep Abiding Prayer - (St. James's, Piccadilly))

<https://www.seedsofsilence.org.uk> (links to many groups and events - Centring prayer and other)

Thomas Kelly (Quaker mystic) -

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Raymond_Kelly_\(Quaker_mystic\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Raymond_Kelly_(Quaker_mystic))

Thomas Keating (Trappist monk - Centering Prayer) - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Keating

Thomas Merton (Trappist monk - Centering Prayer) - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Merton

Our (NFN's) own Friend David Parlett: <https://nontheist-quakers.org.uk/events/new-nfn-monthly-meeting-for-worship-and-creative-conversation/> and scroll down to the last recording for David's 'Theist Cuckoo in the Nontheist Nest'.

Christian Meditation by James Finley SPCK/Harper Collins 2004 ISBN

0-281-05690-0

In Search of Stillness by Joanna Godfrey Wood (Quaker Quicks 2021) ISBN
978-1-78904-707-3

Practical Mystics by Jennifer Kavanagh (Quaker Quicks 2018) ISBN
978-1-78904-279-5

Twelve Quakers and Prayer Quaker Quest 2015 ISBN 0955898374 or
978-0-9558983-7-2

Telling the Truth about God by Rhiannon Grant (Quaker Quicks 2018) ISBN
978-1-78904-081-4 especially the last 3 chapters beginning with 'Not God'.

Thomas Keating - A Meditation - in Appendix p136-7 in my 1996 edition of 'Open Heart, Open Mind - the Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel' but may be somewhere else (and perhaps worded differently?) in later editions.

"A MEDITATION

We begin our prayer by disposing our body. Let it be relaxed and calm, but inwardly alert.

The root of prayer is interior silence. We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. Deep prayer is the laying aside of thoughts. It is the opening of mind and heart, body and feelings-our whole being-to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond words, thoughts and emotions. We do not resist them or suppress them. We accept them as they are and go beyond them, not by effort, but by letting them all go by. We open our awareness to the Ultimate Mystery whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing-closer than consciousness itself. The Ultimate Mystery is the ground in which our being is rooted, the Source from whom our life emerges at every moment.

We are totally present now, with the whole of our being, in complete openness, in deep prayer. The past and future - time itself - are forgotten. We are here in the presence of the Ultimate Mystery. Like the air we breathe, this divine Presence is all around us and within us, distinct from us, but never separate from us. We may sense this Presence drawing us from within, as if touching our spirit and embracing it, or carrying us beyond ourselves into pure awareness.

We surrender to the attraction of interior silence, tranquility, and peace. We do not try to feel anything, reflect about anything. Without effort, without trying, we sink into this Presence, letting everything else go. Let love alone speak: the simple desire to be one with the Presence, to forget self, and to rest in the Ultimate Mystery.

This Presence is immense, yet so humble; awe inspiring, yet so gentle; limitless, yet so intimate, tender and personal. I *know* that I am *known*. Everything in my life is transparent in this Presence. It knows everything about me-all my weaknesses, brokenness, sinfulness- and still loves me infinitely. This Presence is healing, strengthening, refreshing-just by its Presence. It is non-judgmental, self-giving, seeking no reward, boundless in compassion. It is like coming home to a place I should never have left, to an awareness that was somehow always there, but which I did not recognize. I cannot force this awareness, or bring it about. A door opens within me, but from the other side. I seem to have tasted before the mysterious sweetness of this enveloping, permeating Presence. It is both emptiness and fullness at once.

We wait patiently; in silence, openness, and quiet attentiveness; motionless within and without. We surrender to the attraction to be still, to be loved, just to *be*.

How shallow are all the things that upset and discourage me! I resolve to give up the desires that trigger my tormenting emotions. Having tasted true peace, I can let them all go by. Of course, I shall stumble and fall, for I know my weakness. But I will rise at once, for I know my goal. I know where my home *is*."

NOW, that struck me when I first read it. Very Hindu, very Buddhist, very Christian? It sounds like a description of meditation (or contemplation or silent prayer) or Quaker meeting for worship. Having typed it, I realise if I was in a bad mood or feeling quite cynical, I could pick holes all over it and there are some points I don't agree with. However, it stands on its own merits and made a very favourable and revealing first impression.

Trevor