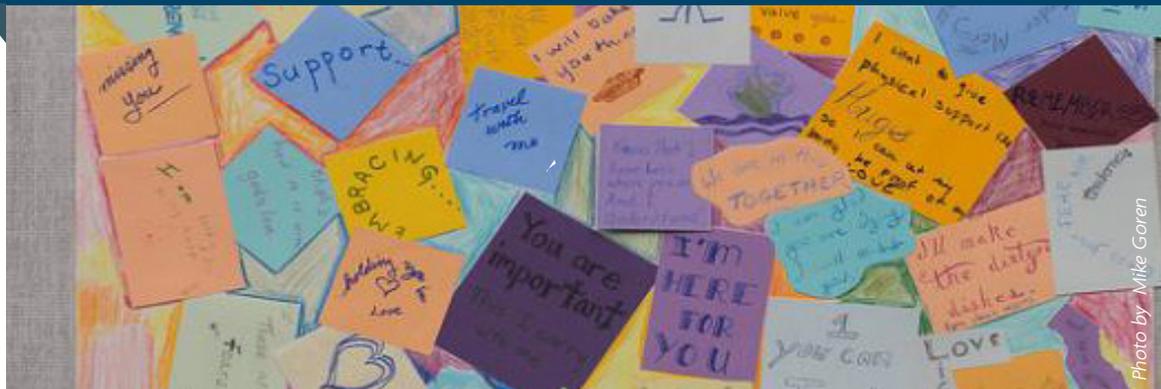




SHARING EXERCISE | Friendly Practices



Individual Preparation for Group Discernment

Overview

Readings from Bill Taber and John Woolman help one evaluate her or his state of mind in Quaker activities. Queries encourage reflection, and practices help in reaching and holding centeredness.



30 min.



Middle School & Up



Newcomer Friendly

Aims & Objectives

When you have completed this topic, you will have experience in becoming aware of your state of mind when participating in Meeting for Business or a committee meeting, and in developing practices to become and stay centered.

Materials & Set-up

Copies of passages for participants to read from Bill Taber and John Woolman.

Instructions:

After *settling into centering worship*, read the following passage to the group.

Credits: Betsy Meyer, Exercise Author.

Birkel, Michael. *The Mind of Christ: Bill Taber on Meeting for Business*.

Wallingford: Pendle Hill, 2010. 27. Print. Woolman, John. *The Journal and Major*

Essays of John Woolman. Ed. Philips P. Moulton.

Richmond: Friends United Press, 2001. Print.

Individual Preparation for Group Discernment

The word disciple brings us back to the dedicated intention that seems necessary for Quaker group discernment. It is a fact long recognized that this process works best when there is a common sense of discipleship among the participants in a business meeting. In such a meeting there needs to be a profound commitment to what ancient Friends called Truth (spelled with a capital "T"). Whatever theology a modern Friend puts into that pregnant and powerful term Truth, it is still possible to be in a disciple relationship to it, to the presence of the living Christ, to the Inward Teacher, to the Holy Spirit. If we come to the business meeting with the intention of being disciples, we are eagerly teachable and reachable and malleable in the hands of the loving Teacher.

(The Mind of Christ: Bill Taber on Meeting for Business, Pendle Hill pamphlet 406 (2010) p. 27)

In an end-note, pamphlet editor Michael Birkel explains discipleship as follows:

"The word "disciple" in Greek means first of all a learner. Disciples therefore must be teachable, not stuck in their own opinions. In the Gospels, the disciples were the dedicated followers of Jesus, willing to leave behind all when called – nets, boats, even family relations (see Matt. 4:20-22). Similarly, Bill Taber suggests, Friends must be ready to leave behind personal, selfish predispositions in Meeting for Business. Just as the disciples of Jesus traveled with him in an unpredictable itinerancy, Friends likewise need to be dedicated to the Spirit and open to whatever direction a leading may take."

Worship Sharing

Reflect upon the state of mind you bring to Meeting for Business or other group discernment.

- Do you bring the teachable mind of a disciple, open to the work of the Spirit?
- How do you feel when conflicts or unsolvable problems arise in business meeting?
- Can you approach these as opportunities to go deeper?
- Can you use a time when the meeting seems boring to center yourself and radiate Light into the meeting?
- When presenting a proposal or speaking to an issue in business meeting, do you feel more like an advocate, mustering cogent arguments, or like a humble servant?

Consider the state of mind that John Woolman brought to his ministry.

In his Journal, Woolman described his preparation and inner state when he attended Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1758:

“[U]nder a sense of my own infirmities and the great danger I felt of turning aside from perfect purity, my mind was often drawn to retire alone and put up my prayers to the Lord that he would be graciously pleased to strengthen me, that setting aside all views of self-interest and the friendship of this world, I might stand fully resigned to his holy will.”

“In this Yearly Meeting several weighty matters were considered, and toward the last, that in relation to dealing with persons who purchased slaves. During the several sittings of the said meeting, my mind was frequently covered with inward prayer, and I could say with David that tears were my meat day and night [Ps. 42:3]. The case of slaveholding lay heavy upon me, nor did I find any engagement to speak directly to any other matter before the meeting. Now when this case was opened, several faithful Friends spake weightily thereto, with which I was comforted, and feeling a concern to cast in my mite, I [spoke].”

(The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman, Phillips P. Moulton, Editor (1989) p. 91-92.)

Preparing Yourself for Worshipful Discernment

Develop your own practices for preparation for business meeting, committee meetings, and other group discernments. Consider writing your own queries for reflection before the business begins. Consider memorizing a passage of Scripture, a prayer, or a poem that helps you to center. You might like to recite this to yourself in business meeting when special centering is needed. Try out the practices at every opportunity, and refine them as you feel the guidance of the Spirit.

After a time of intentionally preparing yourselves for group discernment, schedule a time to meet together as a group to share your experience with these practices. Has bringing this intentionality to group discernment deepened your spiritual life?