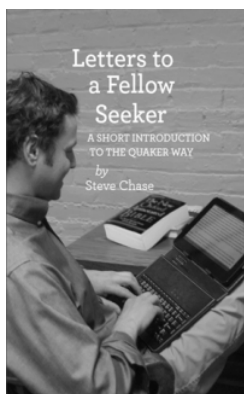


Using *Letters to a Fellow Seeker* in meeting discussion groups

—by Gail Thomas



Letters to A Fellow Seeker by Steve Chase is an excellent addition to materials for an introductory class on Quakerism (called Quakerism 101 in my meeting) or for a discussion group in any meeting to promote lively, thoughtful consideration of “the Quaker way.” You do not need a practiced facilitator, just someone willing to lead the discussions this book is sure to provoke.

One way to structure discussion

I would recommend going through the book one chapter (or letter) at a time. The chapters are short enough to encourage folks to read beforehand.

I recommend the following format for adult discussions: Begin with at least 5 minutes of settling silence. Do quick introductions, with a brief comment on a question you pose (e.g., “on a scale of 1–5, how much do you feel you know about Quakerism?” “Say one term you use for Spirit/God”; “in one word, how are you feeling right now?”) Even such brief sharing helps to build community.

Next invite participants to say briefly what was “most memorable,” “most challenging,” or “most inspiring” in the reading. (This allows a peek into the material for anyone who has come without doing the reading.)

Break into pairs to discuss a question or query so everyone has a chance to get involved. This can be a quick activity – 5-6 minutes in pairs, then a few more minutes for people to tell the larger group of anything special or important that came up in their exchange.

Finally allow 20–30 minutes for a full group discussion. (This is the place you can expand or contract to fit your time allotment) Close with 20 minutes of worship sharing, posing a query that arises from the topic.

Questions for discussion

Appropriate discussion questions will vary with how familiar the group is with Quaker practice. Ask the group if there was a passage or remark that one of them wants to discuss before asking your own questions. Steve Chase's conversational writing style invites readers to share their experiences. Invite others to consider how they might have similar or parallel experiences - or quite different ones. The questions Steve asks his fictional correspondent at the end of each chapter may also be fruitful ones for discussion.

Introduction and Letter One: My Journey to the Quaker Movement

- What was your first experience of a Quaker meeting? What questions did you have? (If you are a lifelong Friend, did you encounter questions or concerns along the way?)
- For friends new to Quakers: What were your first impressions of Quaker meeting? Were you welcomed? Did you find it easy to have questions answered? What was helpful or unhelpful in finding your way to fit in?
- If a longer time Friend: How welcoming is your meeting? What does your meeting do to make Quaker practice transparent? What makes it easy or hard for newcomers to fit in?
- How do you experience divine presence/Spirit/God?

Letter Two: Are Quakers Christian?

- See Steve Chase's question from p. 20: "Does this inclusive and somewhat fuzzy approach of the contemporary Quaker movement sound a little crazy to you?" Do you consider yourself a Christian?
- See the list of Christian values from Phillip Gulley on pp. 18–19. Which ones are your own values? Which ones describe your experience of Quakerism or of Christianity?
- What is it like for you to hear other people's understandings of Jesus?

Letter Three: Silent Worship and the Inward Teacher

- What is your experience of God's presence in meeting for worship? Do some meetings for worship seem deeper than others? What deepens a meeting for you?
 - How "mystical" is your meeting? Do you get a sense of a group spiritual experience?
 - Does the idea of meeting for worship as "improvisational, spiritual jazz" speak to you? Why or why not?
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- What “works” for you in meeting for worship? What strategies help you when the messages - in or outside of your head - seem dissonant?
- Have you turned to the Inward Teacher when you needed help “finding a way out of no way” (page 27)? What was it like?

Letter Four: Ministering One to Another

- What is the experience of offering vocal ministry in meeting for worship like for you? (Or if you have never done so, what are other ways that you “minister” in your meeting or outside of it?)
- Do you ever feel moved to speak and don’t? Have you ever “outrun your guide” (page 36).
- Do you find yourself judging the number, length, or content of others’ messages? What strategies have you developed to listen with an open heart?
- Do you feel that your spiritual gifts are recognized by the meeting? How has your meeting ministered to you?

Letter Five: Quaker Faith and Social Action

- How do you respond to the idea that what our world needs is people who are “creatively maladjusted” (page 46)? In what ways would you describe yourself as creatively maladjusted?
- Steve Chase uses the word “prophetic” in the ancient sense of “answering the spiritual call to seek justice, practice compassion, and walk humbly with God” (page 48). Who are the prophets that influence you?
- When has your meeting addressed concerns about its role in the Beloved Community (whether or not that term was used)? Have such matters been easy or hard for members to agree about?
- What is the role of social action in your spiritual life?

Letter Six: The Struggle to Be Faithful

- What values do you have a hard time living up to, even though they are important to you? How do you treat yourself when you “miss the mark,” as Steve Chase did when he ate at Burger King, despite his own commitment to eating locally?
 - Have you ever felt critical of Quakers in general, or of your meeting in particular, for not setting a high enough standard with respect to a particular principle? How did this affect your relationship to the Quaker movement?
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- What are the ways that your meeting helps you to be more faithful to the Spirit and to your own values?
- What are your expectations of faithfulness for yourself and for other Quakers? Are there ways that you judge yourself and others too harshly or are too lenient?

Letter Seven: My Invitation to You

- What is the difference between being a member and a regular attender of a Quaker meeting? If you have joined a meeting, what change did membership signify to you? If you have not joined, how do you see the difference between your role as attender and the role of members?
- Steve Chase describes a time of self-examination when he realized that he was not in unity with what he understood to be the Quaker ideal of nonviolence. Have you had similar struggles with Quaker values or testimonies? If you discussed these struggles with others in the meeting, how were their responses helpful or unhelpful?
- Overall, what aspects of Steve Chase's spiritual journey as a Quaker echoed your own experiences, and in what ways has it been most different from your own?

Letters to a Fellow Seeker by Steve Chase is available for purchase through QuakerBooks, \$12.95 paperback / \$9.00 ebook

<https://www.quakerbooks.org/book/letters-fellow-seeker>
