

Journal of the Experiment with Light Network

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Issue 16



To know one another in the things that are eternal



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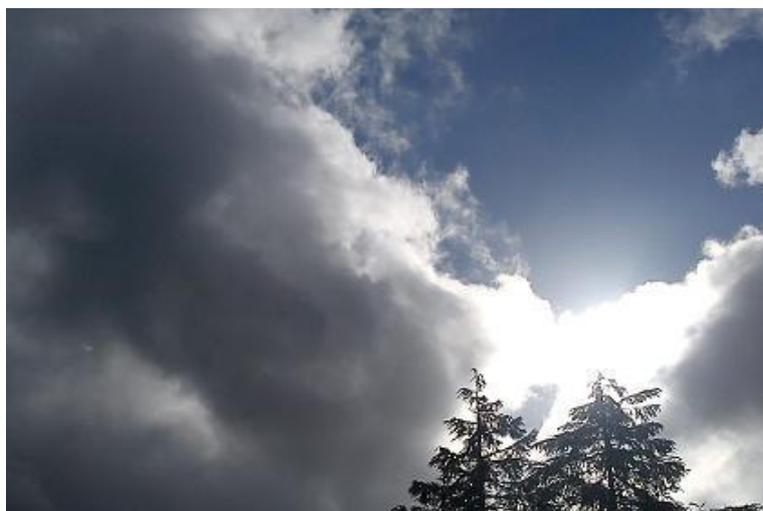
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As we were finalising edition 15 of the Journal, Susie asked me to suggest a theme for this one. I need to walk to reflect and I carry my Friends' experience with me (as I know they do mine) while I walk and notice the beauty of our environment (the photos in this edition are from my walks around local reservoirs).[♦] As I walked, I was casting in my mind the words from my thesis, also hinted at in the article I wrote for no 15: "Love and Light in the Life of the Light group", so I wrote to my Friends in the High Flatts and Pontefract Light groups and asked what they wanted to read in the Journal.

Several ideas came back: **knowing each other in the things that are eternal** (A&Q 18), which is the one chosen for this edition; **long practice of the Experiment**, which will be the theme for the next edition; and physical responses to the Experiment, which we shall come back to for a later edition.

The contributions-on-theme for this edition are from Mark Hebert and Andrea Freeman of High Flatts Light group and from David Marsh of Pontefract Light group - perhaps the deadline for this edition was too short for you to send yours to us or perhaps we didn't explain the theme sufficiently for you to know what to write. Susie and I very much hope that you will send more for the next and subsequent editions.

In January, High Flatts Light group lost two Friends suddenly: Jan Brumfitt (who also belonged to Pontefract Light group) died the day before Martin Smith's funeral. It was a shock and all of us in both groups felt it deeply. Andrea and I were asked to elder Jan's memorial meeting at Ackworth School. High Flatts Experimenters went to Martin's funeral and memorial meeting. Martin had had a dramatic heart attack in



2013 and I had noticed more by how he was than what he shared (we worked in the AM's Canterbury Commitment group as well as in the Light group) that Martin was deeply grateful for being spared - I would say he glowed with his nearness to the eternal. Jan had been widowed in 2014 and we had sat with her through her grief and shock as we now sit with Judith, Martin's widow, in the High Flatts group. Another recently widowed Friend has joined the High Flatts group in the last three months. We have been touching the eternal through these events and Judith is hoping to write on the Experiment and bereavement for our next edition.

[♦] The cover picture is a reflection of the eclipse on 20 March this year.

Mark has often talked of 'loving friendships' in the Light group and his poem reflects what Andrea makes more explicit in prose, how we accept each other in love and in the Spirit. Andrea cites not only on Fox's words, but also illustrates how one Light group brought understanding and engendered love. David reflects .on relationship with the reality of Spirit, especially in the Light group and on Retreat with the Experiment.

Off-theme we have the usual notices and forthcoming events, plus an article from Sue Glover Frykman on introducing European Friends to the Experiment on the Meeting (republished from Quaker Voices). As Sue is a member of Sweden Yearly Meeting and active with EMES, she was not aware of similar Experiments in BYM: see, for example, Hazel Shellens' article on p8 of edition 8 and Hazel and Hilary Painter's article on p10 of edition 12 (both available on the website).

We should also add that we recommend supported discernment before foreshortening Experiment meditations and always recommend that Experiments include time alone and worship sharing. I worked with Rex and Catherine Ambler at Quaker Life Representative Council in April 2012 with shortened timings and we agreed afterwards at the Network Steering Group that this should be done only exceptionally and with additional safeguards (the support of the elders of the event and strong Accompanying Friends acting as elders).

Susie and I hope you find nourishment in this edition and we look forward to hearing from you, whether contributions for future editions, news of your Light group or responses to this or past editions. The deadline for the next issue is 15 November.

4 September 2015



The editors are Helen Meads and Susie Tombs



What it means to know one another

Andrea Freeman

In 1657 George Fox wrote:

Friends, meet together and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was. (QF&P 2.35)

For Fox, the eternal was in the present and present, not something to be enjoyed once dead. So, meeting together is to address the current situation, the woes and tribulations of society now. In order to make the world a better place, we need to start with ourselves, to live a life that is based upon Quaker Testimonies, rather than seeing our actions as optionally Quaker.

When we meet in our Light group, my focus is upon truth, not just a superficial truth that can arise from thought or discussion with friends, but a deep truth about the nature of my self, my nature, behaviour and attitudes. My preconceptions and prejudices are clearly revealed to me. I see this as a stripping away of social trappings and psychological self-protection enabling discernment to take place. In this process I am supported and lovingly encouraged by my companions in the group.

The group functions to answer that of God in each other. We nurture each other in our seeking and, by our witnessing revelations of truth from others, enable greater truths to be found. Fox stressed the notion that the primary Christian experience – which we attempt to experience in our Light group – is that of power, and specifically the power over sin. Once we know the truth, our behaviour may need to change to mirror what we have learnt.

From my readings of Quaker texts, I am aware that this way towards discernment was thought of as ‘seeking to live the life to which God called them.’ That is, listening to the teacher within, which I might experience as my conscience and which alerts me to actions and thoughts that are not consistent with my principles and beliefs. In my self-examination I am alerted to where I am falling short and need to change so as not to hurt either others or myself.

The Light group is a focus for my spiritual struggles, my doubts, and uncomfortable truths about myself, and also a space of delight in the love I experience. I am frequently awed by the truths that others reveal, and also the teachings that I receive from them. I feel valued over and above the personal relationships I have with the individuals in the group. I am accepted warts and all.



Recently I was upset by a family problem, which threatened to sever relationships. I took this into the Light group. During dump-the-day I told my tale of the events, being rational, describing what had happened and others' parts in it all, although feeling very emotional. My Friends heard me calmly, not sympathetic or empathetic but listening and hearing me in that deep place. They silently encouraged me to examine the issues. Together we form a circle of love, I feel connected to them closely as they already know me as I am, and not how I might pretend to be. During the meditation and the time alone in silence afterwards I felt their support. In the same way, I know them, and am aware of opening myself to their search for their own truths and supporting them. Then, my sharing revealed my part in the mess. I had caused this rift in the family

unintentionally and I had to put it right by accepting what I had done. They witnessed my fault, and silently acknowledged my commitment to accept that and make amends. I did not feel judged or blamed or anything from them other than acceptance of who I am, just as I accept them without judging them. Because of them I can love myself as I am, also trying to become a better person by knowing the truth.

I have asked myself: how have I changed since becoming a Quaker? I am still trying to answer that question, but I feel different in myself and I feel differently about my self. I am struggling to live a fully Quaker life.



It is by our 'imperfections' that we move towards each other, towards wholeness of relationship. It is our oddities, our grittiness, the occasions when we hurt or are hurt, that challenge us to a deeper knowledge of each other. Our sins have been said to be stepping-stones to God. (QFP 21.07)

One Dance

Mark Hebert

Oh body swayed to music; Oh brightening glance.

How can we tell the dancer from the dance?

W B Yeats, Among Schoolchildren.

I know you little,
I know, sweet friend I met along the way.
We toss, we skittle,
We throw our balls, our precious lives, away.

One chance, one travel,
One dance between our birth and our undoing.
In silk or gravel,
We hollow out the bed of our own choosing.

And what a choice!
When one-off life demands an instant answer,

We have one voice
To dedicate ourselves to dance or dancer.

The process runs.
The object stultifies and fossilises.
Love many suns!
Have dirty hands! And come in various guises!

No one can tell
You what you are, or tell you how to live.
You do not sell.
You pour your loveliness away. You give.

And so, sweet friend,
I long, for long, so long, to know you better
And see no end
If we can only live by spirit, not by letter.



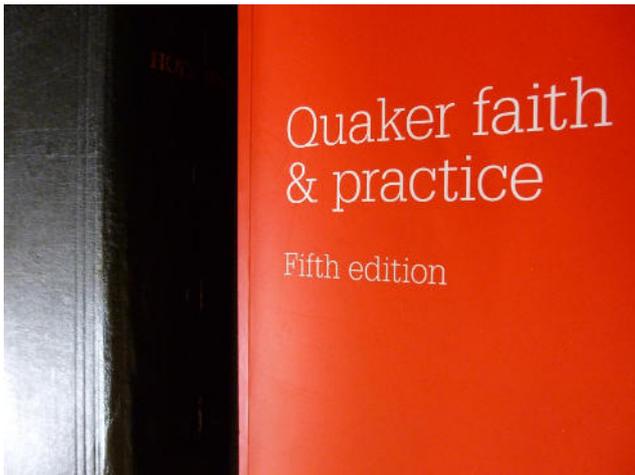
A Revelatory Silence

David Marsh

Be still and know that I AM God. (Psalms 44:10)

When George Fox encouraged us to seek God in our own experience, he was espousing what the psalmist had intuited millennia before him. The fundamental practice of sitting in quietude is the very backbone of Quaker spiritual practice and in accessing this timeless essence we are led to ever deepening levels of stillness that in turn develops the intuitive faculties in which to hear the guiding voice of God. However, our busy minds are not sensitive to spirit; the almost incessant internal dialogue we hold with ourselves cauterises the channels of our receptivity, particularly in difficult times, leaving us feeling emotionally disturbed and often disempowered.

I am attracted to Fox's statement: *"You will say, 'Christ saith this, and the apostles say this;' but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of the Light, and hast thou walked in the Light,*



and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?" I find these words inspiring because they encourage us to seek God, or spirit, as a part of our self-knowledge. What, after all, is the use of reading scriptures, books and hearing testimonies, if we can't partake of the fruit ourselves? However, being able to taste the fruit and achieve a level of receptivity to the **still small voice** isn't always easy, particularly if we have pressing concerns; but if we are able to sit quietly when times are

good or less troubled, and having no agenda other than resting in the silence, the experience can be joyous in its own right, as well as making them easier to sit with when difficulties do arise.

It is through sitting in silence and becoming still that I have felt at the very core of my being, an intimacy that is both nourishing and sweet, leaving me in no doubt as to the reality of spirit. What dawns on me most emphatically whenever I manage to surrender my ego and its almost unrelenting cascade of thoughts and judgments to the silence, is that this purity within that I call "I" at its deepest level, is my natural and essential nature; the I AM which is beyond thoughts and form, the assurance that God IS, that I exist in God and He in me, which I understand to be the Light. This experience has nothing to do with the ego mind, or its own sense of "I"; it is presence itself. I am led to the conclusion that this inward state must be consciously realised, so that I am permanently anchored in this place of purity, rather than in my gross mind.



I have also found that taking part in group practice further facilitates my access to deep levels of silence. This is especially evident when working with the Experiment, as the common focus of gathered individuals often leads me to profound levels of awareness. In my experience within the Pontefract Light group, the shared involvement of meditating with others and sincerely following the prompts of Fox's words, somehow deepens my practice, as if the inter-mutual silence generates positive vibrations that can be difficult to achieve when I am alone. The created synergy within the group (or any spiritual group) has, I am

sure, the power to elevate others in attendance who themselves might be struggling to achieve a state of stillness; this is particularly evident when attending retreats, where working intensively with the Experiment is practiced over a number of days. I have seen Friends slowly shed their worldly concerns and embrace the fullness of the silent retreat, benefiting both mentally and physically from the alimentative surroundings.

I had a very powerful and nourishing experience whilst attending a retreat at Swarthmoor Hall in September 2014. At the time I was going through a particularly busy period of my life (mainly work pressures) and was in need of spiritual refreshment. The environment at Swarthmoor provided an excellent backdrop to engage with the Experiment, as it was steeped in the vibrations of those genuine seekers of Light both past and present. The ease in which I could dispense with the world, albeit temporarily, was certainly aided by the group dynamic, where the silence galvanized those who attended into a whole unit in which the spirit was clearly manifest. Here I am reminded of Christ's words, *"For when two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* (Matthew 18:20)



The spiritual connection with my fellow Experimenters lasted well beyond the time spent within the Light sessions and the few days spent at Swarthmoor, permeating my being for at least a week afterwards. Just knowing that there are others who have a shared commitment to the Light has kept me consistent in my own practice, something I find important in our increasingly secular and estranged society.

Sitting in quietude is no assurance that our lives will be magically freed from difficulties of course. Even if we regularly meditate and are on intimate terms with silence, either within a group or sitting by ourselves, we are still likely to face challenges in our lives, but we don't need to turn our challenges into problems. The power within to which we have access by regularly practising silence gives us the strength to see our problems as they really are from a composed and elevated centre, without the dark haze of fear and emotion clouding our view, for as Fox states:

What the Light doth make manifest and discover, as temptations, distractions, confusions, do not look at these temptations, confusions, corruptions, but at the Light which discovers them and makes them manifest; and with the same Light you may feel over them, to receive power to stand against them ...

This statement when used as part of the Experiment, I have found to be truly healing and inspirational.

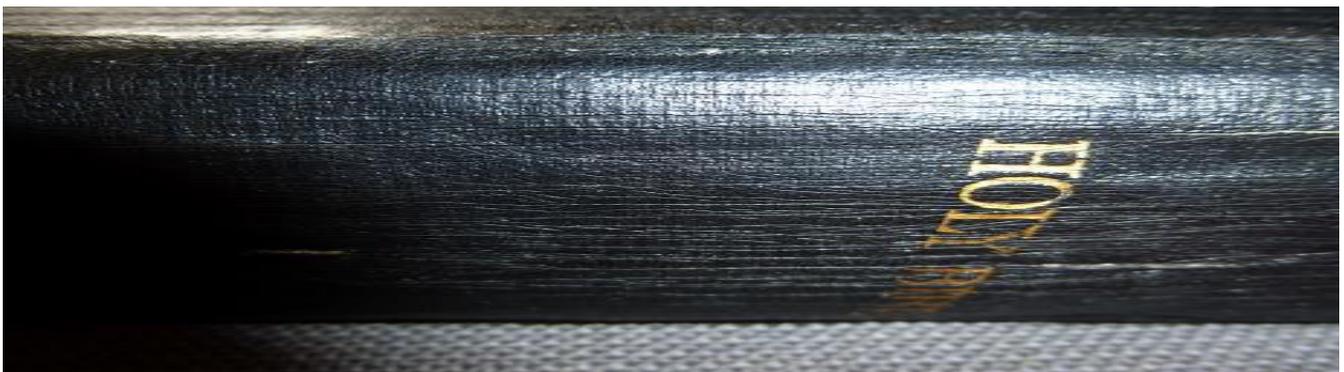
If, however, the only time we endeavour to be still and silent is in times of difficulty, then we are likely to fail in our endeavours to reach the guidance of the Light within, much less

feel any peace. I have discovered that simply by loving the Light, by consciously giving myself to this ineffable something, and acknowledging it as often as I am reminded throughout the day, has given me an inner assurance and confidence that is founded on something unshakable and real. It also brings me into alignment with the first commandment; that love for God must come before all else, at the same time removing the "plank from my own eye" (Luke 6:42) that allows me to see clearly and become a real and intelligent help in response to life's challenges and in giving service to others.

The regular practice of sitting in inward silence is of paramount importance in developing a receptive ear, and even if we can only snatch five minutes at a time, the effects of such a practice can be hugely beneficial and healing in all aspects of our lives. I have found that once I have grounded myself in silence I am far more likely to be focused in my daily activities, am more efficient in my work, am generally calm, and in dealing with people, I find that I have a clearer view into their hearts which then enables me to listen empathetically to them, rather than forming judgments and false conclusions.

Working with the Experiment and delving deeply into the silence has allowed me to partake of and appreciate the wonders of the natural world as well as that of the spiritual dimension. This has affected me in such a profound way that I am left with a continued sense of awe at Life's beauty. The renowned Buddhist monk and spiritual teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, sums things up perfectly:^Y

All the wonders of life are already here. They're calling you. If you can listen to them, you will be able to stop running. What you need, what we all need, is silence. Stop the noise in your mind in order for the wondrous sounds of life to be heard. Then you can begin to live your life authentically and deeply.



Through devoting ourselves to the kingdom within, we can come to recognise ourselves as children of the Light, able to partake of the rich life promised in Christ:

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

^Y *Silence: The Power of Quiet in a World Full of Noise*, Random House, 2015.



Introductions to the Practice:

There are two venues for a weekend introduction to the practice left this year. There is time to understand the Quaker roots of the practice, to try it for ourselves and to then reflect on our experience in a time of quiet.

Glenthorne Quaker Centre,

Easedale Road, Grasmere, Cumbria LA22 9QH,

Tel: +44 (0) 15394 35389

Friday 16 – Sunday 18 October 2015

with Angela Greenwood, Diana Lampen and Mary Pennock

<http://www.glenthorne.org/events/>



Charney Manor

Charney Bassett, Wantage, Oxon OX12 OEJ, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1235 868206

Friday 6 – Sunday 8 November 2015

with Barbara Childs and Susie Tombs

<http://www.charneymanor.com/events>

Day workshops with Meetings or other groups are held around the country. For these, the expenses (travel and photocopying) of the workshop leaders are the only costs charged to the Meeting. To arrange a workshop, contact the Network members at experimentwithlight@gmail.com to book dates and facilitators to help you.

Experiment with Light training

for those who want to nurture their own Light groups and/or help new ones to start.

At **Shallowford House**, Shallowford, Stone, Staffs ST15 0NZ

Bookings to experimentwithlight@gmail.com

Friday 9 – Sunday 11 October 2015

with Rex Ambler, Klaus Huber and Susie Tombs

www.shallowfordhouse.org



Retreats



Experiment with Light: Deepening the practice retreat for established practitioners

Swarthmoor Hall, Cumbria LA12 0JQ

Tel: +44 (0) 1229 583 204

Thursday 17 - Sunday 20 September 2015

with Andrea Freeman, Helen Meads and Margaret Roy

www.woodbrooke.org.uk/courses.php?action=course&id=9952

Day Retreat with Experiment with Light in Quaker Week

High Flatts Meeting House, Quaker Bottom, High Flatts, Huddersfield, HD8 8XU

Saturday 10 October, 2015 10am to 4pm

Contact Helen Meads experimentwithlight@gmail.com

or Andrea Freeman 01484 667376



Other opportunities: If an established Light group would like to arrange a day or weekend retreat based on Experiment with Light, please contact the Network on the usual email: experimentwithlight@gmail.com

Forthcoming in 2016:

Introductory Weekends

25-27 March: Woodbrooke

3-5 June: Charney Manor

5-7 August: Glenthorne

11-13 November: Swarthmoor Hall

Retreats

20-23 May: Swarthmoor Hall

October - One of the Saturdays in Quaker Week: High Flatts



Experiment with Light on the Meeting

Sue Glover Frykman

I became involved with Experiment with Light in the 1990s and attended Rex Ambler's first residential week on the Experiment at Glenthorne Quaker Guest House in Grasmere in 1998. During that week Rex guided us through the possible steps that early Friends had taken when centring down in worship and told us about his own understanding of Fox's concept of the Light after researching his many works and pamphlets. Following this research work, and in his development of the Experiment process in language that spoke to modern-day Friends, Rex created meditations on the individual, the group, the world and the meeting and tested these approaches on a number of Quaker groups.

Rex's work was recognised* and supported in various ways. Accompanying Friends were appointed to uphold and accompany Rex in the work. Interest in the Experiment spread to the extent that Rex received many invitations from various groups in Britain, on the continent and further afield to share his insights and guide Friends in the practice. Many of those who had attended the Glenthorne week also began to help Rex by offering and guiding the Experiment and forming Light groups. I wrote accounts of my experiences of the Experiment for *The Friend* (23 Oct 1998) and *Friends Journal* (March 1999) and how in my own personal life it had helped me to face and work through difficulties and to find inner peace. ♥

* Although Rex had a Support Group of interested Friends at the beginning, Experiment with Light was formally recognised as a Quaker Concern in 2010 when minutes were sent from Lancashire Central & North and Ipswich & Diss AMs to Meeting for Sufferings (MfS). MfS minute S10/12/8 is here: <http://www.quaker.org.uk/meeting-sufferings-december-2010> Following Quaker Life discernment, the Experiment now advances by recognition in Local and Area Meetings within Britain Yearly Meeting and through the Experiment with Light Network. (ed.)

♥ Friends may also be interested to know that in 2009 a group began to meet to disseminate the Experiment more systematically. This group organised training weekends for workshop facilitators and a Conference at Glenthorne in 2011 and thereafter the Experiment with Light Network came into existence (see <http://www.quaker.org.uk/ewl-epistle>), with its Steering Group appointed through Network Gatherings at BYMs (see <http://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk/14-15%20report.pdf>). The Network is not a Listed Informal Group but, rather, is embedded in LM and AM business processes. (ed.)

Interestingly, in the last few months I have again been asked, for various reasons and on different occasions, to guide people through the Experiment.[▲] On the first occasion I did this via Skype and used the focus on the individual. This proved to be helpful to the person concerned, who was then able to attend a meeting she had been dreading and remain cool and calm during it. On the second occasion, an international Quaker workshop on the theme of Eldership and Oversight organised by the Europe and Middle East Section (EMES) of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) I guided thirteen people from ten different countries in the Experiment with a focus on the Meeting (in this context a worship group or Yearly Meeting). Later, members of my own worship group in Sweden asked me to do the Experiment on the Meeting with them. On a fourth and more recent occasion I offered two early morning Experiment sessions on the Meeting in connection with the EMES Annual Meeting. For both these sessions I only had half an hour at my disposal in which to introduce the meditation, guide people through it and allow time for sharing afterwards. That was probably the most challenging in terms of time and adapting the wording accordingly to include the bare essentials, but despite this limitation it proved valuable to those participating. For this fifteen minute meditation I stripped the steps down to: Be still, Wait in the Light; Open your heart to the Truth; Submit to the Light; Be open to new possibilities; and Closure. I included a minimally worded explanation for each step. When choosing the wording it felt important to make it as accessible as possible for those who may not have encountered or experienced the Experiment before. According to the feedback I received afterwards, the right balance seemed to have been achieved.

Following these various Experiments on the Meeting, people shared their experiences of it, either with the gathered group, or on one or two occasions with me alone. I found some of the comments surprising. It surprised me that no-one had used the Experiment on the Meeting before. Those who were already familiar with the Experiment had concentrated on the individual focus. It surprised me that even the very short version offered at the EMES Annual Meeting yielded valuable insights for those taking part. A third and delightful surprise was that many people said that they wanted to use it in their own Meetings and even translate the words into their own languages.

Below are some of the anonymised insights shared by people following the Experiment on the Meeting in the settings mentioned above.

I could say it was a turning point for me both in my life and in my commitment with the Religious Society of Friends.

I enjoyed the Experiment with Light experience. It was short, but powerful.

I saw the Meeting as a web of colourful threads in which I was happily enmeshed.

[▲] In 2013 the Network organised an International Experiment with Light Gathering at Woodbrooke (see edition 9) and it may be that news of the Experiment's recent flourishing carried by Friends from Scandinavia and other parts of Europe who were at Woodbrooke led to Sue's invitations. (*ed.*)



I admit that the idea and concept of Experiment with Light has had a negative ring for me. I associate it with the idea that Quakerism is mainly a method, a method to reach a state of grace called being in the light - which to me seems false, because contact with the Holy is always a gift which you cannot command. However, in this experiment where we focused not on ourselves but on the Meeting, I thought that some light was given me. Surely, it did lead back to myself, because the insight was that I had a tense relation to some of the members, and I now had to realise that to a large extent it depended on me. So it was a valuable experience.

During the Experiment with Light I realised that there was a superficiality in our meeting. Sadly, we do not really 'seek to know one another in the things which are eternal'. Fellowship is on the level of everyday support. We very rarely show one another our deepest needs. Life is not easy and we are busy people, but we do not even seek to have more time together. Are we really seekers?

I focused on what seemed to me to be the main problem in our Meeting - only to be given the insight that another problem was in fact greater, and we had ignored it.

The image that came to me during the meditation was of a large-mesh wire barrier. I have been feeling for some time that although we may know and care for Friends in our own individual worship groups, we generally do not know Friends in other worship groups very well, or even at all. As I reflected more on the image of the wire it came to me that this is a barrier through which we may see and even touch others - it is nothing permanent and would not be impossible to remove.

During the meditation I saw new ways of approaching the conflict in our Meeting.

By way of conclusion, what I have learned from offering the Experiment on the Meeting is that images and insights emerge that yield different and new approaches to a problem. Many people find that they are in fact part of the problem and see that they need to change their own attitudes. Also, if a worshipful atmosphere of expectant waiting is provided, the length of the meditation does not really matter. It is how you come to it and open yourself to it that counts. Although the meditation offered at the EMES Annual Meeting was only fifteen minutes in length, it did not seem to limit the depths that were able to be plumbed. However, this may have been because it was held in a larger Quaker gathering and in the room at Woodbrooke used specifically for meetings for worship. Time for sharing afterwards is important and should be well provided for. Although the allocated

time for the Experiment at the Annual Meeting was limited, there were opportunities for continued reflection and sharing during the three days together. Help was also available from those appointed as elders for the gathering if this proved necessary. The experience of offering the Experiment confirmed that it is a powerful and valuable practice which makes us stand in the Light and see our own situations and settings in a clearer and more distanced way. It is an experiential practice; the power of which can only be appreciated by and in the doing of it. In short, my hope is that the Experiment on the Meeting will be used much more widely in future than has hitherto been the case.



Other news

We are delighted to learn there are **new Light groups** in Chester, Oakham and Worcester. We hope you prosper.

There has been a **distribution of edition 14 of the Journal by post** to all Light groups in BYM, so that you can see how the journal looks in print, together with a couple of copies of the 'What is a Light group' pamphlet. If we don't have a snail mail address for your group, the mailing will come to the Meeting House, so please do alert your Clerk and look out for it. If you don't get it, let us know.

Next month you can **order the four newly recorded CDs of the mediation words online** from Friends House Quaker Bookshop. (See Issue 14 page 13 for details of the CDs.)

Have you seen Rex Ambler's Pendle Hill pamphlet 425 *The Light Within Then and Now?* It is also available from Friends House Bookshop. (Susie says she found it very helpful preparing a general introduction to the Experiment for Bridgend Meeting.)

Klaus Huber has just begun the project of researching and writing **the history of Experiment with Light**. If you have any information or remember anything from the early days which you feel would be interesting, please email us and we'll pass it on to Klaus.

The **Experiment with Light website** has lots of information and resources about the Experiment. Here's a link: <http://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk/>

We are also on **facebook**: <https://www.facebook.com/ExperimentwithLight>

You can **email** us anytime on experimentwithlight@gmail.com with news, comments, articles and contributions for the next or future editions of the Journal, whether on-theme or off-theme. We're always delighted to hear from you.



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