

Why Experiment with Light is important to Quakers today

'We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in; and the Lord appeared daily to us, to our astonishment, amazement and great admiration, insomuch as we often said one unto another with great joy of heart: 'What, is the Kingdom of God come to be with men?' *QFP 19.08*

These words of Francis Howgill, originally spoken over 350 years ago, were re-presented to us out of a deeply gathered Meeting for Worship at Swarthmoor Hall in 2009. They echoed the experience of all of us who have become involved in the Experiment with Light.

Experiment with Light is a simple but powerful meditation. It is the foundation of our Quaker way and was the means by which George Fox introduced others to the experience of the 'inward light'. Experiment with Light is still revolutionary, 350 years later.

This practice is the very foundation of our Quaker way. Having engaged with it and experienced, however dimly and briefly, its life-changing potential there is no going back. In essence it is about building a relationship with the Light, the Universe, God, the Christ: it doesn't matter what you call it, it is beyond what we think of as 'religion', it is beyond words. The Experiment helps us to really know ourselves, which is the key to peace.

One of the greatest difficulties we face in our modern culture in really engaging with this practice is our excessive busyness. For us, the first step of this practice – Be Still – can often be a barrier to going further. Only when we have slowed to the point of being in the same place do we have any chance of relationship, otherwise it's like trying to be with someone while they are quietly and mindfully walking through the woods and we are in the outside lane of the M1.

For some, there is an immediate, 'in your face' experience in their first Experiment, for others it is more gradual; others may feel they haven't 'got' anything but things may emerge later in dreams or an insight may come in an ordinary, everyday context. As we learn to open to that deep spiritual reality within, trust grows; we begin to dare to acknowledge our dark places and see how we might make changes: old patterns can be seen for what they are and let go; things we've habitually avoided or run away from can be safely examined, totally without judgment and we can begin to experience the joy and relief of knowing in this spiritual reality that we are loved. Working within a Light Group there is the growth of trust and a gradual willingness to share from deep within ourselves.

This is not instant enlightenment. It is a simple practice but it is not easy: it requires courage and the commitment to see the process through. Fox himself said 'my own inward sufferings were heavy' and these continued for months – we don't get rid of a lifetime's difficulties overnight. Learning about ourselves is vital. Difficulties faced are never as monstrous as those we have tried to hide from or hide away.

Greater self-knowledge and inner peace automatically brings a greater compassion for others and for ourselves. Because we begin to recognise our own 'hot buttons' we become less reactive to those around us and able to respond from a place of clearness. Only when we have come to terms with our real selves can we truly be of service in the world.