

# Holding a Light group

Guidance, questions and counsel

A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow that reflects on the water. The sky is dark blue with scattered white and grey clouds. The foreground is dark, showing the silhouette of a beach or rocky shore. The text "Experiment with Light" is overlaid in a white, serif font in the upper middle part of the image.

Experiment with Light

What is a Light group? Simply put, a Light group is a group of people who meet to practise the Experiment with Light together and witness the work of the Light in each other's lives. This leaflet attempts to give a fuller answer and contains a summary of helpful points that have been discovered from the practice of many Light groups over the years.

## **Advice on Establishing a Light group**

1. Have you taken the establishment of the group through the Meeting's **business process**? Experience has shown that Meetings can misunderstand the practice if Friends have not had the opportunity to air questions together and to participate in the decision to start the group. Sometimes conflict arises if there has been no opportunity for whole-Meeting discernment, but when a Light group runs with the Meeting's minuted agreement, the spiritual life of the Meeting is enriched, not least because the spiritual lives of the Friends in that Meeting are enriched. The group's use of the Meeting House may also depend on the Meeting's minute.
  
2. Is the Light group to be **open to all-comers**? Friends not immediately drawn to the practice may otherwise feel excluded, even if they do not want to take part. Some Meetings require that the Light group be open to all. Do arrangements mean that all who wish to participate, whatever their capacity (e.g. hearing, mental health, mobility), may be included? Whilst in the past, some Light groups were not open to all, increasingly there is an awareness that all who are interested may join. This can be managed once the group is established by explaining the shape of the group's meeting and the worship sharing method. (See further below Questions and Counsel for running a Light group and the article on page 7 of: <http://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk/ewln121.pdf>.)
  
3. Have you considered asking the Experiment with Light Network to **introduce the practice** in your Meeting in a day workshop, or have Friends from your Meeting been together to a course at one of the

Quaker Centres? Experience suggests a Light group is more likely to be sustained successfully if a core group of Friends have experienced a workshop together, although not all the Friends on the workshop will necessarily join the Light group and not all the Friends in the Light group need to have been on a workshop.

4. **Where to meet:** Is the Light group to meet at the Meeting House or in its members' homes? If at the Meeting House, the Light group may be more identified with the Meeting and be seen more as a Meeting activity. If at group members' homes, how will the group avoid becoming reliant on one member? It is possible the person hosting may feel less able to participate fully if s/he feels s/he is providing hospitality. If the group is to meet at different venues, how will communication with the Meeting and the Light group members be kept strong, so that someone who misses one meeting will not inadvertently be excluded from subsequent meetings?
5. Has sufficient care been given to deciding the **frequency** of Light group meetings? If twice monthly, missing one means it is not too long before the next, but if once a month, some may feel better able to commit to being part of the group.
6. **What time of day** is the Light group to meet? If during the day, those who work may be excluded, but an evening group may not suit retired or older Friends. A Light group will usually take between two and three hours, depending on how many are present. Any agreement about frequency, day, dates and times of meetings can be regularly reviewed.

### Some Questions and Counsel for running a Light group

1. **At the Start:** Does your Light group allow time for those present to share the immediate concerns and feelings that they have come from in the moments and days leading up to the time you all

meet? We have found that doing so, informally or formally, enables members to begin the process of being 'still and cool' from the thoughts and feelings they bring with them to the meeting.

2. Before **the words of the meditation**: Whichever of the forms of words are used, and whether a recording or a member of the group reading aloud is preferred, is everyone in the group clear about the process? Sometimes a change in the version of the wording used can help to open a new insight.
3. If someone is chosen to read the words of the process aloud, does your group make sure that the same person does not have to do this every time? Reading the words aloud may prevent the reader from fully participating in the process.
4. **Time Alone**: During the time alone at the end of the guided steps, does everyone have sufficient time and opportunity to reflect in different ways? Experience shows that at least twenty minutes is typically a minimum, but the time can be spent in many ways: silently waiting while walking or sitting; making a drink; making an object; as well as writing or drawing in a journal.
5. **Group Sharing**: When the group is sharing what came from the practice, is the importance of complete confidentiality reinforced sufficiently in every meeting? It can be helpful to re-state this at every meeting.
6. Are the members of the group truly free not to share at all if they so wish? The pressure of the group can be subtle, and it may be often necessary to reassure those who chose silence that their contribution of stillness and listening is valued.
7. **Closing**: At the end of the period of sharing, some people may be feeling somewhat 'exposed' or tender. Does your group move towards the resumption of the everyday in a considerate spirit?

Would a further period of shared reflections on this experience of the practice be helpful at this point? Or is it better for the group to disperse quietly?

8. **Reviewing the group:** Does your group arrange for occasions to review the way the group is run and how it is developing? Some queries that might arise are:
- ❖ Is the meeting-place, whether someone's home, or a meeting house, still the best place to meet? Is the time of day and day of the week the best for the members who now attend? Are any prevented by either time or place?
  - ❖ Who is responsible for hosting and other arrangements? Can this responsibility be better shared out?
  - ❖ Is the group able to welcome new members? How is this done? How are newcomers introduced to the process so as to make it clear?
  - ❖ Are communications with the Local and Area Meeting clear? Do members of the Local and Area Meetings know the group exists and what it does? Is the presence of the group beneficial to the Meeting as a whole?
  - ❖ Have you considered making your individual experiences of the group the focus of an Experiment with Light meditation together? This can help us all to see more clearly and share from the heart.

## Guidance for sharing in small groups

### What is the purpose of sharing?

In Light groups the sharing is part of a process, and one that is particularly focused on our each opening ourselves to the Light within. After the meditation and the private reflection, we can share with others what happened to us, or what we were shown. The purpose is:

- ❖ to hear ourselves express out loud what we have experienced (which may not have involved words);
- ❖ to allow more to emerge about what we have been shown - more may have emerged as we have spent time alone after the meditation, and as we speak in the sharing yet more may become clear, even though perhaps still unfinished;
- ❖ to communicate to others what truth we have now recognised and hope to hold on to in our everyday lives;
- ❖ to be heard with compassion by others, so that we can feel understood and accepted in what we have revealed of ourselves;
- ❖ to encourage others by telling our experience, as we are encouraged by hearing theirs;
- ❖ to allow members of the group to carry our pain and joy as we carry theirs;
- ❖ to celebrate the power of the Light; to share together how the Light is at work in us, thus building an understanding of our separate and shared lives; to reflect on the process, and the similarities or differences in our experience of it.

## Reminders on Sharing:

### Silence, Sharing and Space

Please begin in silence. Then each person who wishes to share something from their meditation experience does so in turn out of the silence. Share as much or as little as you wish, speaking only about what happened during the meditation. Allow others space to absorb what has been shared before the next person speaks. Carry on in this way until everyone who wishes to speak has done so.

### Freedom

If a group member does not wish to share, that's perfectly acceptable; sometimes the process needs longer to develop without being put into words: we need to be open to both possibilities. (Sometimes it can be helpful to indicate that you do not wish to speak.)

### Responsibility and Listening

Listen creatively without comment or advice. Each person takes responsibility for themselves. We are here as witnesses to the work of the Light in each other.

**Confidentiality.** While we encourage you to speak about your own experience, please don't repeat what anyone else has said at any time:

- ❖ to other members of the large group or in plenary sessions;
- ❖ or outside the group after the event;
- ❖ or even with them in private, unless they choose to broach the subject.

If there is time after everyone has shared there can be an opportunity for a brief exchange of reflections on the shared experience, always bearing in mind the advice about comment and confidentiality. If your group has split into smaller sharing groups, when you return to the plenary there is a chance to reflect further on your experience as a whole.

There is more advice on worship sharing in this article: <http://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk/worshipsharing.pdf>.

*The experience of Light groups has been that these reminders are valuable, and that it is worthwhile re-stating them at meetings: it gives a secure framework to the process. They have been evolved from the input of several groups.*

## Description of two possible typical Light groups

The Light group of **Anyshire Area Meeting** has twelve regular members. They meet in Anytown Meeting House on a Saturday morning once a month.

On this Saturday, at 10 am, the first of the members, A\*\*e, arrives. She has the responsibility for this month of bringing milk, and biscuits, putting on the heating and the hearing loop, and reading the steps of the practice. Shortly afterwards the rest arrive, nine this time, and by 10.30 they are sharing news informally over a cup of tea or coffee.

Between 10.45 and 11 they settle to do the Experiment with Light meditation. A\*\*e has chosen a version they have not used often before. First of all, she reads out the advice on confidentiality, which they do at every meeting.

Using her watch to time herself, she then reads the stages of the practice, leaving 7 minutes between each one, so that this part of the practice takes them about 40 minutes. At the end, most of the group write in their journals, but two go outside to walk in the Meeting House garden, while one quietly pours himself more coffee. After twenty minutes time alone everyone is gathered again, one group in the children's room, one in the meeting room. They have agreed to split into two smaller sharing groups to allow time for everyone to share, without the whole process being too long. The time allowed for sharing is thirty minutes, although it is not strictly timed. They make sure that there is sufficient quiet time after the last person who speaks for the stillness to settle again. This group signal the end with handshaking, as at the end of MfW, and then remain quiet for a few moments.

As they have divided into two, the whole group then meet up again, and share further reflections on their experience of the practice, before finally closing the period of sharing.

Then they decide among themselves who will 'host' the next meeting and confirm the date. The group usually breaks up shortly after, though some stay to talk more.

The **Small Rural Meeting** Light group has eleven regular members (one of whom is not a Quaker). Each month the Light group meets on the first Tuesday at 10am and third Sunday at 2pm (after Meeting for Worship and a shared lunch, although there is no obligation to join for MfW and lunch), unless prevented by snow, at Rural MH.

As Rural Meeting requires the Light group to be open to all, its members come from several different Area Meetings, as well as Local Meetings in its own Area Meeting. Not everyone is able to join every time (some are regular Tuesday, but not Sunday and vice-versa), but three are regularly at both Tuesday and Sunday. Usually an email is circulated to all a few days before the group is due to meet, partly to arrange lifts for those who need collecting from the station (or elsewhere).

Those who arrive first make drinks (a list of who has what is kept in the MH kitchen) and set out the chairs, arrange the CD player and line up the CD ready to play the meditation words.

Within a few minutes of the appointed time, all have arrived and settle in the circle of chairs to clear a space for the meditation by: sharing what of significance has happened since they last met; and how they are feeling. The group maintains worship sharing discipline (QFP 12.21 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> paras) during this sharing, but often the session is light and laughter erupts. When all have spoken, the host reminds everyone to ensure their mobile 'phones are off and outlines what will follow: the

meditation words from the CD; approximately 20 minutes time alone; worship sharing; and choosing the host for next time.

By about 11am/3pm members of the Light group will move to a table, go outside or into the main Meeting Room to record what has happened for them in the meditation. Occasionally one of them will remain sitting in the circle. By about 11:20/3:20, the first to finish her or his time alone will go into the kitchen and make more drinks. By about 11:30/3:30 all are settled back in the circle of chairs and begin sharing their experiences. The sharing arises out of and falls back into the silence and whilst one is speaking the others listen with attention without sound; the host ensures all have an opportunity to speak or confirm that they do not wish to share and, when all have spoken, that someone has taken responsibility for hosting next time.

Finally, everyone shares replacing the chairs, washing up and (depending on the time) two may have to leave to ensure one of them is delivered on time to catch his train home.

(These two descriptions are of course only sketches of two possible groups – every group will be subtly different.)

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| <p>In composing this leaflet we hope to give support to Light groups, however, we all do well to bear in mind the advice of the Elders of Balby in 1656: “These things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by but that all with the measure of light that is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for ‘the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.’” (Advices and Queries)</p> |
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To find out more about Experiment with Light, visit our website:

[www.experiment-with-light.org.uk](http://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk)