

Lesson 2

SILENCE AND CENTERING

SUMMARY FOR ADULTS

The Quaker practice of gathering in silence, often referred to as "Quaker worship" or "Meeting for Worship," is central to our faith. There is an affinity between the Quaker practice of silence and that of Buddhism with its emphasis on meditation. While Buddhism and Christianity have different theological foundations and practices, they share some similarities in their emphasis on personal transformation, self-examination, and the pursuit of inner peace and spiritual insight arising out of silence and self-reflection. These commonalities may have led to some parallel developments in the use of silence and meditation among mystics in both traditions. Native Americans also practice mindfulness in their belief in the spiritual interconnectedness of the natural world.

Quakers value silence as a profound way to encounter the divine presence within themselves and among the gathered community. They refer to this as listening for the "Inner Light" or "still, small voice within." It's a belief that every person has a direct connection to the divine, and by being still and quiet, they can better listen to that inner guidance. They may speak only when they are moved to share a message or insight. This practice is known as "vocal ministry." These spoken messages are typically brief and are meant to offer spiritual wisdom or inspiration to the group.

The silence in a Quaker meeting is not empty but filled with a sense of expectancy, as participants listen attentively to the messages that may arise. The silence can be a profound and meditative experience, allowing individuals to go inward, reflect on their spiritual journey, and seek guidance from the divine.

*In calm and cool silence, once again
I find my old accustomed place among
My brethren, where, perchance, no human tongue
Shall utter words; where never hymn is sung,
Nor dim light falling through the pictured pane!
There, syllabled by silence, let me hear
The still, small voice which reached the prophet's ear.*

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

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LESSON FOR CHILDREN

Let's sit together and agree to be very, very quiet. This silence is like a peaceful space where you can think and feel. This is a very special time for just you. We believe that in this quiet time, you can hear something inside yourself, like a little voice in your heart. It's like a wise friend who gives you good ideas and helps you be a kind and loving person.

In this silence we can think about important things, like if something is making us sad or happy, or how to be better friends, or how to help each other, and how to make the world a nicer place. It's a time to be still, think, and feel and go on a quiet adventure of discovery, to feel loved by all that's good in the world.

SETTLING ROUTINE

No matter what age, we all start with a Settling Routine. You can make up your own. But for today let's all try this one:

Sit in a circle and put your feet on the floor or sit on the floor. Put a large beautiful bowl or box in the center and invite everyone to put all their thoughts into the bowl or box for safe keeping.

- Big Exhale
- Notice any tension in your neck or body
- Now take 3 breaths in and out
- Lift your big toe on one of your feet and set it back down
- Notice where your body is touching the chair
- Notice any sounds in the room
- Notice the air moving over your skin
- Now let's take one more deep breath, and say hello to each other.

For younger children: The above settling routine can be enough. A Settling Jar (instructions below) can be used or any kind of sand hourglass or other method of keeping time can also be appropriate. Go on to the activities or readings.

For older children: Go on to a guided meditation, such as the one below. They can also be found on Youtube. Another excellent guided meditation is [A Handful of Quiet: Happiness in Four Pebbles](#) by Thich Nhat Hanh.

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GUIDED MEDITATION

(Adapted from How to Meditate Without Leaving the World by Avery Brooks)

Pick a meditation object. Pick a natural object, a picture, a word, a quote or a household item. Place it in the middle of the circle.

What have we here? Just relax, center and settle into the quiet. Out loud make simple observations of the object. Color, Texture, Shapes. (5 minutes)

Focus on One Observation. Now choose one thing to think about that you have observed. What struck you strongly, puzzled you or surprised you?

What Does This Mean? Use your imagination to think of how your observation relates to your life. Is there meaning in what you've seen? If you like, share your observation with the group.

Settle into Silence. Settle into a few minutes of silence, and when the group is ready, acknowledge your friends in the circle.

QUERY

Did you enjoy the silence or was it hard?

When have I heard the still, small voice telling me to do something good in my life?

RAINSTORM

Lead the children in the rainstorm: start by rubbing your hands slowly together, then the next person joins, and so on around the circle. Then you get to finger snapping on the next go around. Next pick up the pace and volume by slapping your thighs, next add stamping your feet. Now go backwards around the circle, slapping your thighs, finger snapping, slowly rubbing your hands, and then silence.

PASS THE TROUBLES

Sit in a circle around a box of some kind with a lid - no talking. The first person makes an imaginary lump of their troubles. They then pass this to the next person who remolds it into their troubles and passes it to the next person. When the troubles have made the rounds of the entire circle, the last person puts them into the box in the center and closes the lid.

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ACTIVITIES

Making a Settling Jar. [For very young children] Take any attractive glass jar that has a tight lid, and fill it with water and 20% clear glue or glycerin. You can put food coloring in if you like. Blend well. Sprinkle two tablespoons of both large and small glitter in and reseal. You can also put a tiny seahorse or other toy in. When its time to settle into silence, turn the jar over and watch the glitter slowly sink to the bottom. If you like glue a frog to the top of the lid and watch the frog's thoughts slowly settle.

Being Present: Have a large translucent bowl in the center. Pass cards around and invite people to write hopes for the future and their memories on the card and go around the circle and put those cards in the bowl. "Stones are heavy, and problems or questions can feel heavy and dark. If you would like to add a stone to the bowl, you may, but you don't have to." Pass around a basket of stones. "In worship, we invite the divine presence to work on everything we bring and put into the vessel of our worship. We each bring the Light we can gather." Pass around a basket of clear glass beads and invite people to add them to the bowl. "The bowl is like a strong, open, prepared space in meeting for worship, where we bring who we are and who we hope to be, including our joys and challenges, our dark and light, to hold in community as we listen together for God." Settle into silence and invite people to share any thoughts or feelings they have about what they put into the bowl. (from Looking Back, Looking Forward, and Being Present by Melinda Wenner Bradley)

Balance Board. Ask if someone has a balance board to bring in. Balance boards are a good way to practice physical centering and a nice way to center on your feet.

FIELD TRIPS

Visit to Queens County Farm for their corn maze in the fall.

Go on a Walking Meditation in a local area.

Visit local Zen Buddhist temples or other places of meditation.

READING & RESOURCES

The Bible story of Elijah listening for the voice of God in various places, and eventually hears God in a still, small voice. (I Kings 19:3-18).

A Handful of Quiet: Happiness in Four Pebbles by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Mindfulness with Aloha Breath by Thao Le

Sitting Still Like a Frog, Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and the their parents) by Eline Snel (recommended by S. Ryder)

Another Way to Listen by Byrd Baylor (recommended by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Religious Education Concerns Group)

Jesus Calling: 365 Devotions for Kids by Sarah Young

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Slow Down: 50 Mindful Moments in Nature by Rachel Williams

Finding Om by Rashmi Bismarck

Drawing God by Karen Kiefer