

Spiritual State of the Meeting, January 26, 2020

Recently, we had a Listening Session after Meeting for Worship to assess the Spiritual State of the Meeting (the SSOM). To reflect on this fluid state is to address our connection with the Inner Light or Spirit within ourselves and within the corporate body of our meeting. BYM had sent queries for people to ponder prior to the Listening Session, which we used during the session.

Friends were asked to share out of a centered Silence. Below are some thoughts both quoting and summarizing the speakers' messages:

The first query asked how we nurture our ministry and gifts. Generally speaking, we have many ways we minister: continuing to maintain support for Friends from the former South Mountain Fellowship group, MAJR, lobbying, Our Daily Bread, Unity with Nature activities and advocacies, support groups and clearness committees, interest groups, a Faithfulness Group, our new sound system, our retreats, Quaker Speaks videos and discussions, and more. Specifically, it was noted that the Nominating Committee has an annual practice of calling each person in the Directory and asking F/friends what strengths and shortfalls they can identify in PFM. Additionally, the caller may inquire what strengths the called-Friend may have; how s/he could envision serving the Meeting; how we could be helpful to their spiritual growth; and, in what manner the individual can foresee the Meeting improving and/or repairing any disruptions that may have occurred during the previous year.

The second query asked about how it is we do or do not respond to our Inner Voice and callings. Friends readily identified obstacles that *prevent* us from attending to our callings and/or leadings. They mentioned "divided attention/fear/anger/time-starvation." Interestingly, many F/friends saw the positive value that these same obstacles offer. For example, some positive reframes about the power of fear were: "Fear can be a powerful motivator" ... "it could be a useful driver to change" ... it can be viewed as an "energy" ...empowering the Friend to "move outward in self-confidence." Another Friend noted his "fear of perfectionism is rooted in protecting me...But being exposed to loving kindness is helping me get over my fear."

A third query related to going forward when mistakes are made. Our Meeting reframed the concept of mistakes as opportunities for personal growth, such as, mistakes offer information and should be celebrated; “Authentic failure is an opportunity to strip away Self”; “Mistakes won’t stop—Forgiveness occurs. We must acknowledge our mistakes. We must ask forgiveness. We have to work through mistakes.” The Meeting has labored this year to respond to issues of conflict and discord. We have now developed a protocol to deal with such issues in the future, consistent with Quaker principles.

Additionally, one Friend offered when we create a sense of safety to those in our Meeting, Friends allow themselves to be vulnerable. It is through this spiritual process of transforming fear into safe vulnerability that we encounter a foundation to access our Inner Light, which shines outward to envelop others. Mistakes can divide or they can unify by creating opportunities to build a new beginning and/or to begin the healing process.

The final query was how we love and reach out to the world. As a general comment, one Friend suggested it takes getting to know another person to understand who s/he is and what his or her needs are. And, when we know the other very well, together we begin to form a community. There are many concrete ways we attempt to get to know others in and outside our immediate Meeting: we have our Care Partners, instituted by M & C to reach out to the people in our Meeting; we participate in Courageous Conversations and PATH to converse with others from our larger and more diverse racial and religious community; we serve at Our Daily Bread and we help a Syrian family who offer a lively version (four children of varying ages and temperaments) of differences and diversity; we participate in Quarterly Meeting, BYM Annual Session, and the annual FGC gathering.

Many of us show our love through service to our family, our Meeting, our community and beyond, as well as through our chosen professions. We are challenged by those who appear to express themselves through acts of hatred and violence. One Friend admitted, “I haven’t found a way to love across all differences. I haven’t learned how to engage those who act on their prejudice and hatred.”

Another Friend said that there is a Buddhist teaching that “talks about reprehensible views as being confused...It is so much easier not to get hooked if

you see it as confusion.” Our Meeting is richly blessed by those who bring Buddhist’s teachings to our group.

To conclude the session, one Friend offered:

“There’s magic in this Meeting.

People feel it.

People stay because they feel it.

It arises collectively.

People are committed to being loving with one another.

It says something very important about the spiritual health of the Meeting.”

In the past few years, all our spiritual state of the Meeting reports have a thread of this shared loving feeling. We think that although our Meeting is not perfect, we have developed a culture of love and respect for those who enter our community.