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THE MANY MEANINGS OF QUAKER MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

by Leonard Kenworthy

Quaker meetings for worship can be — and often are — many-splendored experiences. They vary greatly from meeting to meeting and even within a given period of worship in the power of the silence and in the power of the spoken word. Sometimes they are uninspiring, but often they are unique, moving, remarkable, inspiring, enriching.

The variations are so many and so rapid that they frequently remind me of the old-fashioned kaleidoscopes which shifted their patterns with a twist of the wrist.

Reflecting on the many meanings of such periods of worship in expectant silence, I think of Quaker meeting as:

A Confessional

where I open up to the Divine my sins and shortcomings and try to figure out why they exist and what I can do to correct them.

A Spiritual Gymnasium

in which I wrestle with my well-being and that of others, striving to release new sources of energy for the hours, days, and weeks ahead.

A Philosopher's Study

in which I search for the meaning of life and my place on this planet, including my hopes and dreams and what I can do about them.

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A Nursery or Garden

in which I plant seeds and nurture them as they grow gradually over time.

An Architect's Studio

in which I plan my life—sometimes for long stretches of time; sometimes for shorter periods, like a month, a week, or a day.

A Mapping Station

where my fellow travelers and I plan our lifetime journeys—alone and together.

An Accountant's Office

where I tally my assets and liabilities—including my finances—striving to use these resources wisely for myself and the world.

A Vast Mural

in which I paint in vivid colors ever so many people, books, events, and movements for spiritual and social betterment, which have enhanced my life—giving thanks for these beneficial experiences.

An Historical Museum

where I view and review the high points in the history of Christianity and of other world religions, and of the Religious Society of Friends, expressing gratitude for the past and reflecting on my part in the present and future.

A Stained-Glass Window

in which each of us present is a tiny and unique part, bound together in our common search for meaningfulness through our shared silence and our shared messages—all intended to let the Light stream into our shared worship.

An Orchestra

with a wide variety of instruments, which produce beautiful music when they are properly tuned and expertly played, under the direction of the Great Conductor.

A Launching Pad

for social concerns, ranging from small local tasks to global movements; some being carried out alone, some in conjunction with others.

A Holy of Holies

in which we as worshipers push aside the curtain of our busy and often hectic lives and enter into a special place where we dialogue with the Divine and listen for words of forgiveness, words of encouragement, and words of wisdom from the great Source of Light and Love.

Such are some of my ways of describing our periods of individual and corporate worship in expectant silence under divine guidance. How would you describe your feelings about these demanding and difficult but highly rewarding times of Quaker worship? □