

toward God, and at the same time, God is also the inner core of me. The silence within and the silence without are one. The spark of God within and the God without are in deep communication. For that rime, I am whole. The ancients spoke of the music of the spheres. For those moments, I am listening to the music of silence, resonating in tune with God, in harmony with all that is.

Silence can be full of noise: grocery lists, disagreements at home or at work. What can we do to find internal quiet? Some things we can do to help us center should be done on an ongoing basis. Others can be done before worship, others during worship. And there are ways we can help other worshipers center. The most important thing I can do on an ongoing basis is make time every day for silence. Then silence never gets so far away I can't find it on Sundays. Centering is a muscle that needs exercise. If I center only on Sundays, my centering will not be so deep and life changing as if I exercise my centering muscles every day.

### **Centering before Worship**

- Walk to meeting. I feel that the rhythm of walking helps me get in tune with the Universe.
- Read something devotional before worship. *Listening Spirituality*, Psalms, *The Quiet Eye* if you're a visual person, Aldous Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy*

have all helped me at various times in my life, Journaling before worship is a great aid to centering.

- Be outside. Just sitting outside helps me. Pulling weeds may be too work-oriented for some; for me, it helps me resonate in tune with the Universe.
- Pray. If something is on my mind, it helps me to pray about it as I walk to meeting. I seldom pray during meeting, except sometimes late in worship a few words will come to me. I have a policy of not trying to shape worship, not even by planning to use worship to pray. I do my praying before worship and let God set the agenda during worship.
- Take care of unfinished business before trying to center. Jesus said we should forgive our brother before going to the temple to pray. If I'm thinking about an argument I've had during worship, it helps me to resolve firmly to set things right as soon as I get home. Then I can center.

### **Centering during Worship**

- Worship begins when the first person enters the meeting room. When I am the first one, I feel I am going before the others and preparing the place for them; the quality of my silence makes centering better and easier for others. It helps me center if I pray for others in worship with me - pray that they experience God's presence, ask God to be with us during worship. One elderly

Friend and I used to conspire to pray for God's presence at the beginning of worship, and we both felt our prayers deepened the silence for the whole group.

- Repeat a mantra. One Friend recites many names of God to center herself. Another Friend recalls her grandfather centered by reciting the names of Mary. A young Friend recites an attribute of God - peace or shalom, whichever speaks to him most in the instant. Eknath Eswaran in his book *Meditation* recommends memorizing a passage like St. Francis's prayer to recite over and over as we center. I find that if I start worship reciting a short passage, as I get more centered the passage becomes a single phrase, then just a single word, and finally I enter deep inner silence. I walk to work many days, and I repeat a name of God as I walk. The back part of my mind thinks its own thoughts, but have come to feel that I'm having my thoughts in the presence of God.

- Metaphors help. Mine is letting go-I let go of my issues and thoughts during worship. Bonnie Zimmer speaks of floating down a spiral staircase. When she gets to the bottom of the spiral staircase, she is centered.

### **Helping Others Center**

- My centering during meeting for worship is integrally connected to the quality of the corporate silence. The

community of worship helps us worship. There is a power in the community of silence. Some things can be done to help deepen the corporate silence.

- Don't enter the room late. The late one arrives uncentered; that works uncenter me.
- Don't read. I've seen Friends study physics or read murder-and-mayhem novels, but even spiritual reading during worship changes the silence in a detectable way. Reading about God is not the same as making an opportunity to experience God. People who read are quiet and they are focused, but they are not focused on worship. That weakens the focus of the others in the room.
- Try not to sleep. People sleeping can dilute the worship experience. I remember going home from worship one Sunday and telling my husband, "There were five people sleeping in worship today." He replied at once. "And there was one person counting how many were sleeping, instead of worshipping!" It's harder for me to worship when others sleep. Sometimes the sleeper can't help it. When I know the person can't help sleeping I try to hold the sleeper in me Light, to wrap him and enfold him in the silence of worship. I try to think of him as sleeping in the presence of God.
- Don't do meeting business with someone for "just a few minutes" before worship. I think doing this makes it

harder for both people to center and often shortens me time both have to center. If I have a care for me quality of another's silence, it helps me center as well.

The final piece of advice I can offer about centering is Just Do It. Start where you are--where you really are. Centering is a doorway to worship. Some churches use music, liturgy, sermons and stained glass to bring about a worship experience. As a Quaker, I have felt great personal responsibility for the quality of worship. Centering and inner silence are a doorway. That's all they are--the threshold. Centering is also a highly personal act, a choice I make. I have to work at it; sometimes it takes the entire meeting for worship to center. And sometimes, being centered is simply given. Either way, worked-for or gift, centering is a means to an end, a tool. The end is my relationship with God. If I can get centered, inwardly quiet, I can hear the still small voice of God. That's what I really want. All the rest, important as it is for the worship experience to happen, signifies nothing without God as She is in Himself.

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## Life in the Meeting Centering

Centering is a metaphor Quakers use to talk about getting ourselves into a condition where we can worship. Trying to say what I mean by centering seems to require more metaphors. Letting go of outward cares - the grocery lists, the concerns on the job - is an essential ingredient of centering. Centering helps me change from focusing on the dailiness of life to the Eternal--or at least not on myself. I speak of getting in touch with my center, with the Eternal. Whatever the Eternal is, it is at our very core. I feel I am getting in touch with God-within-me. When I center I allow myself to be in the presence of God.

Getting inwardly silent is one way of describing the goal of centering. For a time, there are no words; my experience of centering is that I have had thoughts for which there are no words. Words for the experience, if they come, come later. Seldom am I aware of being wordless until the wordlessness is past. I've been somewhere Else, and I only know I've left the dailiness of life when I return.

There's a different physical feeling when I am centered. My center is often in the region of my heart. I feel as though I am covered with antennae around a central core of silence. The antennae are pointed