



# Worship Journeys

Getting into worship – practice for all ages

September 2013



## Getting ready

Quaker worship, both collectively and individually, is about a direct and transforming experience of the Divine. However, over time and through both experiment and experience, many Quakers have found that the most effective way to access this experience is through stillness and silence. Achieving the kind of inner quiet needed to really open ourselves to worship takes practice. This special issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* offers ways to help children explore becoming physically and mentally still in order to deepen and enrich their experience of meeting for worship.

Everything suggested is good for the practice and learning of people of any age in Meeting.

If you are going to lead a session find an earlier opportunity to meet with any other adults working with you and talk about your own experiences in worship. Friends are often shy of doing this, but we cannot talk freely with the children unless we are comfortable doing it with one another. Such a meeting might explore the following questions:

- What do I do in the first 10 – 15 minutes of worship?
- How do I deal with distracting thoughts?
- When I feel, “That was a really good meeting”, what might that be?
- Are there times when it seems as if nothing is happening for me in worship? What do I do about it?

Decide beforehand whether you will do all three of the exercises suggested in Engage; it is probably better to do only two to give time for children to discuss their experiences. The other can be tried at a later meeting. Use a circle of chairs rather than sitting on cushions or the floor. If you choose exercise 3, you will need A4 sheets of paper and preferably wax crayons for this rather than coloured pencils, paint or markers. Make sure you have plenty of reds, oranges and yellows, with the paper stripped off any short pieces of crayon so they can be used sideways for shading.

*Journeys in the Spirit* offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with children and young people.

It provides opportunities for exploring, creating and learning in an atmosphere of worship in partnership on our shared journey in the spirit. There is a children’s work and a youth work edition that are published monthly and termly respectively.

This special issue is one of several that include *Abolition Journeys*; *Schools Journeys*; *Journeys with 0 - 4 year olds*.

These are available at:

[www.quaker.org.uk/journeys/special-issues-children](http://www.quaker.org.uk/journeys/special-issues-children)

## Gather

Start with a short discussion sitting in a circle.

Your introduction will vary depending on whether you have all come from the adult meeting or met in the children’s room. If it’s the latter, you may like to ask how children’s meeting usually starts (“With a short quiet time?”), and say, “Today we’re going to do that later, because first we want to talk about why we do that, and then practise how to do it well.” Possible discussion questions are as follows:

“What are the grown-ups in the meeting doing now?” “Why do you think they are doing that?” (Expect a range of answers). “What do you feel when you are doing that yourselves?” (The adults may wish to give brief answers themselves, among the children’s responses). “Do you find it easy or difficult?” (When they mention difficulties, acknowledge that it can be the same for adults). Limit the discussion to ten minutes or less. Then tell the children that we are now going to try ways to make worship easier and more interesting.

# Engage

## Exercise One

Give the children the chance for a quick stretch, and then ask them to sit again. Ask each child round the circle what kind of behaviour disturbs the meeting for worship most. (*Checklist: talking, playing with a noisy toy, trying to get the attention of another child or adult, yawning or sighing, leg swinging, turning a book's pages noisily.*)

As each child in turn makes a suggestion, ask her or him to act it out. Enjoy any exaggeration. If any behaviours on the checklist are not mentioned, adults can name and act them.

Tell them, "We are now going to practice something which helps us not to do any of those things." Gently and slowly give the following instructions:

- Sit as straight as you can and close your eyes
- Tighten up all your muscles and then slowly let them go very soft and relaxed
- Breathe slowly. (*Count slowly*) In... two... three... Out... two... three... four... (*Count again for three or four cycles*) Keep breathing slowly like that, and discover how the air feels cold in your nose as you breathe in and warm as you breathe out. (*Resume counting if you think the children are losing the rhythm, three for the in-breath, four for the out.*)
- Depending on the age and concentration of the group, continue the breathing for up to three minutes.
- Open your eyes.
- I'm going to ask each of you to choose one word to say how your body feels now. (*Ask them, round the circle. If any child complains of dizziness, tell them to keep their eyes open next time, but looking at one spot on the floor.*)

Ask children to tell you why this might be good practice for silent worship. If they are unsure, help them to realise that if we let our bodies become calm, it helps our minds and spirits to become peaceful too.

## Exercise Two

Say to the children something like, "We're now going to do another exercise; it's about the things we may be thinking when we are quiet. When you try to sit very still, thoughts come into your minds. Sometimes these are nice thoughts about things you've done or are looking forward to. If that happens, just enjoy them and feel thankful. But remember, worship isn't the best time to be making plans in detail. Also, sometimes we find (and grown-ups do too!) that we are thinking about worries or problems or bad memories. This exercise is about letting those thoughts go, so we can become peaceful inside."

Ask them to become quiet and relaxed again, and breathe as they did before. You may need to count the breathing rhythm again. Then say:

- "While you breathe, imagine that you are blowing up a balloon. As you breathe out the warm air, imagine that you are blowing out the fear or worry. Think, 'Goodbye worries' as you breathe out." (*Short pause*)
- "Now imagine that you are tying up the balloon and letting it go. It is going up into the sky so the wind can blow those worrying thoughts away. Watch it go, smaller and smaller." (*Pause*).
- "As you breathe in, pretend you are breathing in something you need to help you. Think one word each time you breathe in, like 'Love' or 'Help' or 'Strength' or 'Friendship'. (*Continue for about two minutes*).
- "Now, open your eyes slowly, breathe a bit faster, and stand up and stretch."

## References & other resources



In Series 2 of *Journeys in the Spirit* children's work edition there are several issues with ideas, activities and information about children and worship:

Issue 12 – *Stilling, centering and listening inwardly*

Issue 14 – *Meeting for Worship*

Issue 16 – *Prayer*

Issue 21 – *Finding Treasure*

All of these can be read and downloaded at:

[www.quaker.org.uk/journeys/archive-children](http://www.quaker.org.uk/journeys/archive-children)

To subscribe to *Journeys in the Spirit* go to: [www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren](http://www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren) where there is a link in the sidebar to an online subscription form.

## References & other resources

Background to 'talking sticks' can be read at:

[www.stipo.info/Artikel/The\\_story\\_of\\_the\\_Talking\\_Stick](http://www.stipo.info/Artikel/The_story_of_the_Talking_Stick)



If you can find a copy of *Opening Doors to Quaker Worship* (Friends General Conf. USA, 1994) it is a useful resource book for working with children on worship. There may be a copy in your meeting house library.

## Spring into all age worship



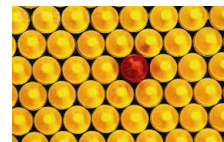
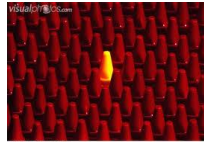
A pack to help Quaker meetings explore and organise all age worship. Details and download at: [www.quaker.org.uk/working-with-all-ages](http://www.quaker.org.uk/working-with-all-ages)

## Engage

### Exercise Three

Ask the children to use wax crayons to draw an empty room on a piece of paper. There can be a door and a window, but no furniture or people. Can they make the room full of bright glowing light? Suggest the children use a lot of yellow and orange to make it as bright as they can. (*Not more than five minutes*)

Sit in the circle again and breathe as we have been doing. Look at your picture. Then shut your eyes and imagine someone you love comes into your room. They are happy as they enjoy the light and warmth; they forget their busy-ness and worries while they are there. (*Long pause*)



## Respond

### Sharing time

*It may be helpful to use a Talking Stick or something similar at this stage. In Native American tradition this is a stick decorated with feathers and beads, but any object with an interesting shape, or a small soft toy, will serve. It is passed to whoever wants to speak next. While someone is holding it, only they (and the leader of the activity if absolutely necessary) are allowed to speak, and everyone else must listen to them. See sidebar for more information.*

The aim of this time is to share our experiences in the exercises we have been doing. It may be helpful if an adult shares first, to "break the ice" and to model the kind of thing one might like to share. It's not necessary to speak round the circle in turn; but it is important to ensure that everyone has been given the chance to share something.

If children find it hard to put their experiences into words, you might need to prompt them with questions, as clear and brief as possible - the more adults talk, the less the children will. Questions might include:

- Did they feel comfortable and peaceful?
- Was it an interesting thing to do?
- Did this sharing time help them understand why people come to meeting?
- If you gave them Exercise Two did anyone feel it could be a way to help with a problem?
- If you gave them Exercise Three (which Quakers call "holding someone in the Light") did they enjoy doing it?

You also could ask the children whether they feel they need to look at a book during their time in silent worship. If you read a book, does it mean that you won't really experience the worship, so you're missing something which might be good? What about toys? Having a toy to hold is not very different from reading a book, but is there something helpful about holding a cuddly toy?

At a later point you might think about helping the children develop a richer vocabulary for talking about their spiritual experiences. The Quaker shorthand they may hear adults use, such as, "the Light", "holding someone in the Light", "having a concern", "centering", "discernment", "a leading", is often not explained, so they can't use our words to describe experiences and insights. Remember to ask, what are their words? How would they describe their experiences?

## Reflect

If the group is now going into the adult worship, you can encourage the children to practise the things they have been doing. If they have done Exercise Three, ask them to take their pictures to help them – say that when they are worshipping in future, they won't need an actual drawing.

Otherwise, the children's meeting can end with a period of silent worship in which they can practise what they have learnt.

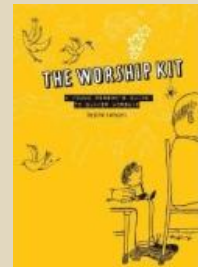
## Review

Immediately afterwards, the group of adults can evaluate the children's discussion and worship. In their sharing after the exercises, did some of the children express a sense of achieving peace and stillness? Remember that this may not be what everyone has experienced. In their worship, or when they joined the adult meeting, was there a feeling of gathered worship, even if only briefly? If not, can you say why not?

Explain to parents and grandparents what you have been doing. Encourage them to talk to their children about some of their own experiences in worship, and to listen to their children's experiences.

About two weeks (or sessions) later, check that the children remember what you did together. Ask, "Are you using the exercise in worship?" and "Would you like to practise some of it again?" If you only did two of the exercises, this might be the opportunity to do the other one.

*The Worship Kit* written by John Lampen was the basis for the Exploring Worship weekends at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre run by Quaker Life children and young people's team for 8 – 12 year olds. This was an effective tool for equipping children in their worship practice and ministry. *The Worship Kit* is available from the Quaker Bookshop – 020 7663 1030 or at: [www.quaker.org.uk/shop](http://www.quaker.org.uk/shop)



## Quaker meeting and me

A guide for children to Quaker meeting for worship



This booklet, to help children think and talk about meeting for worship, is available free from the Quaker Bookshop on 020 7663 1030 and at [www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-centre](http://www.quaker.org.uk/quaker-centre)

This special issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* was written by John Lampen and edited by Chris Nickolay and Howard Nurden in the Quaker Life children and young people's team.

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