

2021 Supplement  
to the  
2014 Interim Faith & Practice  
New England Yearly Meeting

Personal Spiritual Practices

This supplement contains additional text that has received preliminary approval by New England Yearly Meeting in Annual Sessions.

As additional texts are approved, additional Supplements will be produced.

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# Personal Spiritual Practices

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*“Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of Life, which is its portion.”*  
Isaac Pennington, 1661

*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... . If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.* Galatians 5: 22-23, 25

The basic spiritual discipline of Friends is regular worship, both communal and individual. This discipline is supported by a variety of practices. Just as one supports a busy life with healthy personal habits, which vary from person to person, Friends choose spiritual practices that help ground them in the life and guidance of the Spirit. Although most of these are shared with other faiths, a few are especially valued by Friends, such as intentionally taking time to “stand still in the Light” (George Fox) and to “sink down to the Seed”. Friends believe that the Light can illuminate the whole of one’s spiritual being. It may fill one with joy and comfort, or it may show what is distressing and difficult, shedding light on places one may not wish to acknowledge or face. By embracing this guidance of the Spirit, Friends open themselves to the possibility of transformation.

Friends seek to live in continual awareness of the Spirit. It is the underlying intention of awakening to the Presence that makes something a spiritual practice. Many people commit themselves to a daily spiritual practice to settle their hearts and minds and to refresh their awareness of God’s presence and guidance. Early Friends recommended daily times of “retirement”: time spent in worship, prayer and Bible reading, in silent waiting upon the Spirit, and in journal writing. Contemporary Friends continue to use these practices and have augmented them with readings from Quaker writers past and present, meditation, gratitude practices, engagement with nature, wisdom from other traditions, movement, artistic endeavors, and service, among others. Friends may also look for those moments in their lives when they feel particularly centered or open to the movement of Divine love and find ways to use these times of awareness as a spiritual practice. When Friends embrace these times as a priority, they make space for them, integrating these practices into their lives. Regardless of how peaceful or busy a Friend’s life may feel in any particular moment, taking time to attend to one’s own spiritual condition can offer refreshment and renewal.

A daily spiritual practice helps bring one into a realm of spiritual stillness that opens one to the Inward Light. The Light illuminates the inner landscape, allowing one to see oneself more clearly. Early Friends spoke of being “searched” by the light while at the same time feeling the calling and the support to transform themselves. Friends understand that in opening themselves to the enlivening influences of the Spirit, their experience allows them to become more open channels of God’s love. Spiritual practices also help one to stay in balance, bringing one back to center and so more available to the motions of divine love. Sometimes the fruits of a practice are what one hopes for and expects. At other times those fruits may be surprising, challenging, and life-changing. Sometimes it is difficult to recognize them at all. While a spiritual practice is the journey of an individual with the Inward Light, it bears fruit in the world.

Over time it is not uncommon to find that a particular spiritual practice no longer opens the space of refreshment and inspiration that it has in the past. An ebb and flow of motivation to continue in a daily practice is also a common experience. Spiritually dry periods or plateaus can be discouraging, yet worship, patience, and trust may reveal important lessons. By remaining alert to the changing dynamics of living in the Spirit, one may come to discern whether it is right to continue a particular practice, despite the dryness, or whether it is time to move on. The counsel of a spiritual companion can be a great aid in this discernment. Seemingly independent of one's effort or awareness, experiences of breakthrough may arrive.

Children also experience spiritual insights. They understand, at an early age, the impulse toward moments of quiet joy or spontaneous expressions of gratitude and may instinctively adopt spiritual practices that center, calm, and sustain them in difficult times. A child's awareness of the Presence often reveals itself in unselfconscious expressions of awe and wonder at life. The freshness of a child's trust and exuberance of discovery are gifts. Young people learn to nurture spiritual awareness by observing the practices of adults in their lives. Many families use mealtimes to pause together for silent grace or a spoken prayer of gratitude. Times of shared reverence can be a source of joy for all ages.

Friends who practice a discipline of worship throughout the week come to meeting prepared for corporate worship. They are able to center more quickly and help to anchor the meeting in prayer. Their practice is a gift to the community, enhancing its life in the Spirit and aiding in the faithful conduct of business.

Spiritual discipline, at its heart, involves a decision to listen for, and be obedient to, the Inward Guide in every situation, holding the commitment to do whatever love requires.

*Begin where you are. Obey now. Use what little obedience you are capable of, even if it be like a grain of mustard seed. Begin where you are. Live this present moment, this present hour as you now sit in your seats in utter, utter submission and openness toward Him."*

Thomas Kelly, 1939

## Extracts on Personal Spiritual Practices

1. Retirement may be the practice most accessible to contemporary Friends. Our meetings for worship are times of retirement. Walks in the woods or sitting by the ocean can be times of retirement, as can retreats extended over several days. Thomas Kelly wrote that we can be in contact with "an amazing sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a divine center." Times of retirement are the times when we pull back from the chatter and busyness of our outward lives, enter that amazing sanctuary, and allow our inner wisdom, the Inward Teacher, to rise up in us. For early Friends retirement was a prerequisite for a life of faithfulness. Retirement was a daily discipline, sometimes many times in a day. We may think that at the pace of 21st-century life, there isn't time for daily retirement, yet retirement is a basic building block for all other spiritual disciplines. We have to pause, let the static quiet, so that we can hear. Thomas Kelly reassures us that if we establish mental habits of inward orientation, the processes of inward prayer do not grow more complex, but more simple.

Patricia McBee, 2003

2. Stand still in that which is pure, after ye see yourselves; and then mercy comes in. After thou seest thy thoughts... do not think, but submit; and then power comes. Stand still in that which shows and discovers; and there doth strength immediately come. And stand still in the light, and submit to it, and the other will be hushed and gone; and then content[ment] comes.

George Fox, 1652

3. The purpose of meditation is to enable us to hear God more clearly. Meditation is listening, sensing, heeding the life and light of Christ. This comes right to the heart of our faith. The life that pleases God is not a set of religious duties; it is to hear His voice and obey His word. Meditation opens the door to this way of living.

Richard Foster, 1978

4. Just before the farm dam, I pause, totally by myself. I look up the valley. The sky is an incredible blue, touched by the rock faces of the mountains. I rest on my stick, and I am filled with peace. God is near.

Neil Brathwaite, 2007

5. *Written shortly after the death of his father with whom he shared a passion for photography.*

The real beauty is the magic that happens while the product is being made. For myself that journey consists of silence, listening to the world around me and waiting for it to speak....Most of the time I find that peace in nature, but that's only a particular setting.

I find my inner light has a clearer voice when the waves of the ocean lap on the rocks with the sun dipping below the horizon and lighting the sky with deep golds and reds to darker magentas and deep purple blues. I can feel my father next to me, sitting in silence as we wait for the magic hour to pass while capturing images that center my mind and bring me to calm....The journey of art is my religious space, the end product is the voice that has sparked me to speak. Whether someone likes it or not is not what is important to me, it is the journey....

Will Reilly, unpublished, 2020

6. Consider now the prayer-life of Jesus... Incident after incident is introduced by the statement that Jesus was praying. Are we so much nearer God that we can afford to dispense with that which to Him was of such vital moment? But apart from this, it seems to me that this prayer-habit of Jesus throws light upon the purpose of prayer. ... We pray, not to change God's will, but to bring our wills into correspondence with His.

William Littleboy, 1937

7. I have always greeted God in the morning. It makes a difference. There is no way that I would have faced my teaching day without morning devotional time. One year I had a girl in my class whose behavior often devastated the other children, leaving them in tears. Having used many methods of responding to her behavior and its impact on the other children, I knew that more help was needed. Each morning I held her in prayer with me, in a circle of light, putting Jesus in the mix as well. I could not do this alone and needed a strong visual to remind me of that. Her behavior gradually changed for the better. One day she surprised me by giving me a hug. I do not know if the prayers helped her, or more probably, changed me, and my relationship to her, and she responded positively.

Sue Reilly, 2021

8. I love to knit. I love creating lovely things, learning new stitches, designing my own patterns. But really, how many shawls, sweaters, socks can one person use? I have discovered over time that knitting for charity is a useful way to engage in a craft I love without being overwhelmed by things I don't really need. As I was browsing through charity knitting websites I came across the story of a mother whose infant died at birth. She recounted the pain of going to the children's section of a department store to find a gown in which to bury her child. The store was filled with mothers and healthy babies and adorable clothing her child would never grow

to wear. She fled, overwhelmed with grief. I found patterns for burial gowns on the site and thought maybe I should try one. Small, no big commitment, not too complicated. As I began to knit, however, I found myself thinking about that mother. I was grateful that I never had to experience that pain. I grew more and more quiet in my mind, simply letting my hands be guided by compassion. The completed gown and cap were given to a friend who is a chaplain in a hospital that specializes in high risk births. She asked me to knit more. Since then, I have knit many burial gowns, the smallest only six inches from neck to hem. I don't knit them all the time. I wait until I find myself unsettled in my own life, feeling unbalanced, or small minded, or ungrateful. Then it is time. As love and compassion flow through my needles, they also flow through me. As I offer a gift of love and healing, I am also healed, returned to balance, held in loving arms.

Marion Athearn, 2017

9. Music. The language of all humankind. For some, it is the vibration of the sound that flows up from the ground and flows through their body becoming the drum of their heartbeat. For some it is a friend, holding them. For some it is what knows exactly the right thing to say. For some it is what inspires movement, drawing their arms to sky, palms open. For me, it is sanctuary. Music is the air that I breathe, the food that I hunger for. In a wide ocean with no boat, it is my life jacket. Music is what flows through my veins and pours out of my soul, it fills my belly in the evening...There is a sense of such awe that I experience when singing or otherwise creating song with a group of other people. It becomes evident that we each are all merely a colored piece of thread, woven together into a larger tapestry. Together we sing through the dissonances and burst into colorful harmonies, we mourn together, and we sing of splendor and joy together. I don't know what God is. I don't know who, why, or how God is. I don't even know IF God is. What I do know, though, is that whatever this light is, whatever this energy shared amongst all of humanity is, this feeling, this togetherness, this LOVE, is what will bring me to walk hand in hand with the unexpected, and lead me through the melody of life.

Joli Reynolds, age 18, 2020

10. For many of us, it's in meeting for worship (typically in a Quaker meetinghouse) that we most readily connect deeply with Spirit, seek guidance, offer thanks for the abundance of our lives, and honestly feel the pain and confusion that sometimes dominate life's moments.

But in artistic creation, and in the contemplation of the artistic, we can also be present with Spirit, and open to important leadings. For me, being in the dance studio, typically with my camera, I've found that as I experience the creation of new choreography I witness a living, moving rendition of God's grandeur. The dance studio has become my other meetinghouse, where miracles happen every day and where both the dancers' and my own creativity come alive and find new expression. A spirit of grace enters my life each time I set forth in these sacred spaces, and God does speak to me. Just as we center into worship, I center into my presence in that space where dance is created. I use the word "worship" to describe this experience – there is no other word that captures the reverence and excitement. Early Friends were afraid of the arts, concerned that artistic work would be a distraction from the spiritual work that is so important. Friends were cautioned to avoid the arts, to not have pianos or other instruments in their homes, and to shun any possible distractions. My testimony is exactly the opposite: creating and experiencing any artistic work is a way to encounter our spiritual center, to be led by it, and to express it. When we stop measuring our artistic attempts and just look for the purity and passion of our intent and our source, we will find that our lives are filled with even more spiritual nourishment.

Arthur Fink, 2018



11. I read that I was supposed to make ‘a place for inward retirement and waiting upon God’ in my daily life, as the Queries in those days expressed it... At last I began to realise... that these apparently stuffy old Friends were really talking sense. If I studied what they were trying to tell me, I might possibly find that the ‘place of inward retirement’ was not a place I had to go to, it was there all the time. I could know the ‘place of inward retirement’ wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, and find the spiritual refreshment for which, knowingly or unknowingly, I was longing, and hear the voice of God in my heart. Thus I began to realise that prayer was not a formality, or an obligation, it was a place which was there all the time and always available.
- Elfrida Vipont Foulds, 1983**

Also, see the 2014 *Interim Faith and Practice*, Extracts 1.18, 1.20 and 1.36.

## Advices

1. Preserve places of silence in your life to “sink down to the Seed”.
2. Yield your life to the Inward Guide, remembering to turn to that guidance throughout your day.
3. Make time for the Bible and spiritual writings in your devotional reading. Become familiar with the experiences of Friends through time.
4. Be aware of times and activities which help ground you and open you to the Presence, and make space for them in your life.
5. Recognize and uphold the spiritual life of children and youth. Invite them into times of quiet reflection and prayer.
6. Know that you are held in love when your practice takes you to a place of illumination that is painful or unsettling. Open yourself to God and the possibility of transformation.
7. Experiment. Be adventurous.

## Queries

1. Do you make time in your daily life for reading, silence and waiting for God in prayer that you may know more of the guidance and presence of the Holy Spirit?
2. Do your spiritual practices lead you to a greater sense of the Presence?
3. What practices help open you to be a channel for Divine love?
4. Do you take time to attend to your spiritual condition? Do you turn to Faith and Practice for inspiration as a part of your spiritual practice?
5. Are there times you resist a spiritual practice, and why?
6. During times of dryness or difficulty what helps you to persevere? Can you trust that God’s work is continuing when you cannot feel it?

## Extracts References

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