

The way forward for Quakers

Historical perspective

Attempting to write about the way forward for the Quaker movement is like the poor sighted mouse trying to describe an elephant. Which part of my limited perspective am I describing?

I am not trying to liken Quakers to an elephant, you understand. The 17th century Quakers may have been more like a vegetarian sabre toothed tiger (the impossible creature, but somehow Quakers produced it), but perhaps we today are nearer to a Koala; largely well liked and comfortable, but losing its habitat if not an endangered species.

I do feel significant empathy with George Fox, the inspiration for the Quaker movement from about 1650, except that I do not find it easy to access his charisma, strength of purpose and obedience to the spirit within myself! However, the spirit of George Fox is alive in society today. The spirit that inspired George Fox, Christ Jesus, is alive and the spirit that has drawn many into the Society of Friends - be it called Buddha Nature, New Age consciousness, Tao, the absolute or even agnosticism - is alive. The label is only a label. Delve into the history of the world and there is a unifying spirit. We are all ONE. It is this same spirit that inspires me, you, everyone. George Fox tapped spontaneously into this spirit and from this one spirit everything else flowed in him.

I do not think it possible to re-interpret George Fox for today's world, for he was a man of his time. What I will do is look at some of his statements, using the methodology used by the early Quakers, to allow an interpretation guided by the spirit rather than my own view. I wish to see the elephant in all its glory. The following quotes are taken out of context. I could choose a different set of quotes and give a very different picture. This does not matter so long as it is the spirit that guides the words. We seek what is required of us today. That will not be the same as was required of the early Quakers.

They sent out the Valiant 60, who together transformed the face of the country and but for the persecution may well have transformed it forever.

Although George Fox wrote many thousands of words it was his actions and those of the early Quakers which led them to love, to have strength and to speak the truth, which was followed by persecution by the State, for truth is dangerous to the State. Being a Quaker is not an easy option and may be less easy in the future if we can redefine ourselves and touch even a small fraction of that early charisma, love and strength. My dilemma is to use words to convey the power of actions without those actions necessarily being established in the current Society of Friends.

My aim, simply, is to redefine early Quaker inspiration and process, in the light of the present day, in order to seek unity, not only within Quakers, but within our community.

Be still and cool in thy own spirit. (George Fox QFP 2:18 1658)

We live in a world which moves ever more quickly, typified by the statement 'I want it all and I want it now'.

BE STILL.....NOW, BE STILL.....

Perhaps you think that you can fall straight into a place of stillness, perhaps not. In truth we all see moments of stillness; the universe makes sure of that, again and again. Perhaps our attention is caught by a beautiful, fragrant flower or by a raging thunderstorm. Here there is stillness. If we say that we cannot be still this is a cover. We can all be still. The early Quakers understood stillness. It was their practice. It is the practice of Quakers today. We practise stillness; we repeat it again and again. Do we practise stillness as far as we are able in our lives? Do others understand and experience our stillness? Remember to be still, even for a second, as often as you can throughout the day. Let others catch the stillness. Offer others the chance to join in our stillness. Open up conversations about it; risk looking different.

Everything is within. George Fox A summary of 'The measure is within, the light is within, the pearl is within' from early Quaker writing.

I imagine George Fox, at a very young age, sitting in a field, alone and still in rural Leicestershire, unhappy that the priest was the arbiter of all spirituality, when suddenly he had his Eureka moment. 'Everything is within'. Of course it is. 2000 years of not knowing replaced by an eternity of certainty. I had read those words, 'everything is within', many times over without realising their power. I had to experience it. Walking along the street, sudden realisation, my heart did '*leap with joy*' (George Fox QFP 19.02); no words needed, just knowing. Everything inward exploding outward using all the senses simultaneously in an explosion of joy and the still centre has been touched. '*Through the earthquake, wind and fire, thou still small voice of calm*' (J.G. Whittier, *Dear Lord and father of Mankind* QFP 20.03)

When we can regain this sense of joy we can only touch others. Christians have a word for this, conversion. Quakers have the wonderfully descriptive word 'tendering', brittle made softer and more open, tender and loving.

This is not just 'some things are within', but 'everything is within'. Within is a microcosm of the macrocosm. We are one with the universe and the moments of joy and tendering are its realisation. We do not need all those books on self-help, mindfulness and spiritual awareness that proliferate in our bookshops, for the teacher is within, entirely. Perhaps we do not trust that. We may strive as Quakers to be more spiritual but that very striving can get in the way sometimes. Going inward requires a state of mind, a stillness; an emptying, not a filling up.

Do we practise going inward until there is no need to practise? Do we expect the explosion of joy that can follow? We do not need a reason to go inside..... just do it. Our Quaker meetings are only a practice ground for our lives. What is described will be spontaneous when the time comes. As a Society of Friends we define ourselves, as did the early Quakers, with a sense of this inwardness. It is a reduction, an emptying, a meditation. Read as much as you want, but remember that words can only point towards the truth.

Stay with the experience of the life within you, and this will free you from a dependence on words. (George Fox, Truth of the Heart, Rex Ambler, section 64)

George Fox knew the bible references by heart and used them freely, but then wrote and understood such beautiful short statements, like Buddhist Sutras, standing alone and pouring out meaning at many levels. This is the essence of the spirit which supersedes all written words. The simplicity takes my breath away. And so that we know where the problem is today, four centuries later, he writes (Truth of the Heart, section 67): *'I could write much more about these things, but they are hard to express, and also hard to take, because people now have so much conflict and foolishness in their minds that they fail to experience the quiet and stillness in the pure spirit of God where things are revealed that have been veiled, where things are opened up that have been hidden, and where things are uncovered that have been covered up.'*

This is the same message as in the ancient Indian Vedas, from 4000 years ago. They 'just knew'. For someone to spontaneously discover this against the power of the church of the time, on his own, was quite remarkable.

Wait in the Light (George Fox, Truth of the Heart, Rex Ambler, 3.6)

The George Fox incident which moves me most happened when he was repeatedly hit with a stick by one of a mob, but he stood firm, stood to face the mob with love, to be beaten again. The mob eventually dispersed and surely was more tender and surely some became the first Quakers. He could have been killed, but he was cool and showed love from the heart for the aggressor. A life speaking! If he had run away or retaliated there would be no Quaker story. Being a Quaker is not an easy option. You are being beaten by the mob; pain, fear..... WAIT..... let the light shine. An extreme case? I don't think so. I see so many people who have suffered abuse in their lives that I wonder what normality is.

There is a fine line between 'just let it happen', which seems weak, and *'Love thy neighbour as thyself' (Romans 13:9)*. George Fox knew that his aggressor was his neighbour when beaten with the stick. From this incident sprang the strength, courage and obedience of the first Quakers.

WAIT..... whatever comes.... fear, pain, love. The light will overcome the darkness. This is a cliché statement so long as time matters. Waiting is outside time, for when the 'time' comes the response will be spontaneous. George Fox didn't have to become still, go inward and wait; he knew what to do because he was still. He was still, inward and waiting. It was his condition. The light shone relentlessly in his life; everything is within, but we must learn to trust it.

A word that has grown in importance for me recently is 'allow'. In trusting what the light offers we must be able to allow it in. Do we live in the manner that will trust to wait in the light? Live life from a place of stillness, and spontaneity will follow when we don't try to force an issue in our favour. When the light shines on the darkness, that spontaneity will be joyful, tendering and loving. Trust in the process. Conflict may come, disharmony may come, distractions may come, but the light will overcome. Waiting requires someone with the authority to 'hold the space' and to understand the power of this alone. The early Friends knew. They called it Eldership. An Elder accompanied a travelling minister. That's how important they saw it to be.

What we may uncover when we trust and allow is truth. *'Know one another in the things which are eternal'* (George Fox QFP 2.35). Quakers were originally called Friends of Truth, now we are called Friends. I don't know when 'of Truth' was lost, it was quite early in the Quaker growth, but the Society of Friends changed from that point. Truth is eternal and is within, but largely inaccessible in society today. We know what truth is, but we don't know what we know. The veil covers our eyes. Thousands of years of state and church control cannot easily be removed overnight, however still we can become.

'Are you open to new light from whatever source it may come?' (A&Q 1.02.7)

'Everything is within' is so powerful that stillness and waiting can produce a sea-change in thinking. Many meditation practices understand the power of this. Typically, Eastern meditation focuses on excluding unwanted distractions. The Quaker practice is unique in opening up to whatever happens: 'Are you open to new light from whatever source it may come?' We close down so many sources of truth by judgment and selection. Being open to new light is central to Quaker thinking. 'From whatever source' is inclusive, it promotes equality, it unites. Trusting the inner light

led the early Quakers into many radical and dangerous courses of action, always challenging the status quo of the country.

'I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion for all wars.'
(George Fox QFP 24.01)

Our peace testimony unites us; many people come to Quakers because of it. What do we mean by it? What would you do if someone attacked your family? What would you do if someone attacked you? George Fox was clear on this, as shown by his actions. Taking the blows of the mob but standing still in the light, sending out love, transformed a situation. It could have killed him, as it has killed many. Peace-making is not an easy option. I was so impressed by my two pre-teenage boys when we were approached by a group of 15 youths with sticks in an isolated park. We spent 20 minutes walking backwards, facing the mob, as my boys heeded my quiet prompts not to show any hint of retaliation to the mob's posturing threats. Many, typically teenage boys, are not so lucky.

Refusing to doff a cap in the presence of a judge may seem odd to us today, but as an example of a testimony to equality it was unifying in George Fox's day. When Gandhi decided to walk across India to make salt (a practice forbidden by the British Empire) it wasn't challenged; it didn't seem important, but it united India. Every generation has its simple gesture. What is the simple gesture for Quakers today? Perhaps it is a non-verbal one as we risk standing in twos and threes in shopping centres and in railway stations handing out leaflets asking for people to join us in stillness. Westminster Friends do this at Speakers Corner every month.

Be patterns, be examples in all countries — that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people and to them, then you will walk cheerfully over the earth addressing that of God in everyone. *(George Fox QFP 19.32)*

How can we address 'that of God' in everyone? There is a strong argument that the Society of Friends (Quakers) is not in unity of purpose. It is loosely held together by a forgotten feeling which many newcomers have difficulty discerning. We are seen as a

friendly Society, perhaps, but not as Friends of Truth. Let us meet to discern the way forward as a priority, using the Quaker method of 'Be still, wait, be open, trust and allow'. This is a spiritual priority for the Society of Friends. The message is one of unconditional love. There are many ways to speak truth. '*Let your lives speak*' (George Fox (1652)) is another way of putting it. We are not expected to live like the early Quakers. Who today lets their lives speak? I pause.....because it isn't me and it isn't many of the Quakers that I know. Maybe I'm being hard on myself and others, but the bar is set quite high by the early Quakers and we don't come near.

Now I am clear, fully clear. (George Fox QFP 21.49)

George Fox's last recorded words. Clearness is a process, it is never complete. Only when all the veils which shadow the light have been removed, only when all the filters are removed do we see clearness. Then we see unity; we see that we are all one. We return to the still point from which we started. Pain, uncertainty, illness and death can bring us nearer to clearness.

Summary

We each see the elephant from a tiny perspective with our eyes. We cannot pull back far enough, nor are our eyes good enough, to see the whole elephant in all its glory; its vision as a species, its hearing, its body sense, its movement, its relationship to others, its touch, its smell and its sound. That is why we are destroying the earth by degrees. We do not understand. The earth groans and we groan with it.

We remain quiet so as not to offend. There need be no fear in conflict and apparent differences between us. We can make a start with each other and be open in honesty. We can say what we need to say and stay present with each other when we disagree. We can use the Quaker method of worship to see the risk we must take.

We can know the difference between the man and the message. It is not the man we follow but the eternal message, so simple and yet often so far away behind the veils. I will leave it to George Fox to end the first part of this essay.

George Fox Truth of the Heart 3.84 (modern translation)

'Dear Friends,

My love to you in the holy peaceable truth

that never changes,

or tolerates evil,

But sets everyone free

who receives it

and lives by it.

It is above all clouds without rain

and wells without water

and trees without fruit.

And from the truth flows justice,

equity, rightness, devotion

mercy and tenderness.

It brings the human heart, mind, soul and spirit

to the infinite and

incomprehensible God.

And from it a love flows

to the whole creation

A love that wants everyone

to come to know the truth..... '

Practical Course of Action

Out of the vast number of possibilities, where will Quakers be in 2014 and beyond?
We have a Framework for Action and must remain true to this.

I will outline possible practical steps for the next five years. This is a limited representation from the mouse's point of view, but that is all George Fox had in 1652 and yet he nearly succeeded in transforming the view of the country. The spirit accessed by George Fox allows the wider perspective.

Development Worker/ Development committee

Here is the Ambridge of a Quaker Area Meeting attempting to implement the framework. They have an ageing membership, at least one large town meeting with children, at least one 17th Century Meeting House with very small membership and a £100,000 bill for repairs just around the corner, but are desperate not to sell this inheritance to developers. They have at least one meeting which wants no part in change. They have some very spiritual and able members but feel stuck and overburdened. They have some hard choices to make.

The AM is lucky enough to be able to appoint someone to help them to implement the framework as a short term paid post, but finds that suitable persons with the skills needed are in short supply. The post will involve teaching facilitation skills for groups, creative web design and web-writing and web-training of many individuals, someone who is focused and practical yet inspirational with a wide range of individuals and groups, a Quaker full of energy with excellent communication skills, a publicist and a presenter.

They have been turned down for extra funding as such development is expected of the AM.

The AM is lucky enough to have the funds for this. The AM is forward enough to see the priority in such a venture. AM's may need to group together to support a paid post or be exceptionally lucky to have a small committee willing and responsible for the planning of the development.

The Development Worker needs the sensitivity to come into an AM and handle its diverse personalities and ethos and not step on the toes of Elders, Overseers or Clerk. The Development Worker also needs the strength of character and charisma to convince LM and AM of a shared way forward, supported by a BYM which knows the way forward.

Such a worker cannot just do the work alone as the time frame for the post will pass quickly. S/he must support others to do much of the work against comments such as 'You're getting paid for this'.

The busy AM will need to find more than 10 minutes to discuss the way forward and the request for an innovative event will need more consideration than 'Later, Friends'. With AM's typically held every two months progress may be slow. AM's must be open to new possibilities.

Against this backdrop the Framework can be developed, with BYM showing clearness and support.

Approach to Stillness

Stillness is our inheritance from the early Friends (Quakers). The 'still point' defines us and can hold the earthquake, wind and fire. It is basic to our meeting for Worship. Yet do newcomers understand what goes on? There are as many views on the stillness as there are Quakers. We must look at what happens in the stillness, not just in Meeting for Worship, but in our lives. Unite an AM in talking about stillness and our experience of it in as many ways possible. We can design 'Pass on Stillness' cards, where a standard business type card is handed out asking for holders to be still for a moment whenever they see the card. We can hold 5 minute stillness sessions in libraries or in the street. We can have conversations with anyone who will be with us in stillness for a moment. We can contact and arrange to talk to charity groups and we can talk informally in the workplace. Let our voice be heard.

On a wider scale a Development Worker or Committee can help to co-ordinate experiences of stillness through various media: radio, dance, poetry, writing, performance art. Quotes on stillness can be produced for a calendar or diary or on the

website. The list of options is endless. We need just a little innovation here. We need to try new locations. This requires significant time and commitment. The non-Quaker www.justthisday.org puts this into action, with stillness events on November 25th 2009.

When I suggested stillness sessions in my workplace it was laughed at by senior staff, ridiculed by some students and loved by others. However, there are a growing number of educational establishments in all sectors of education which have whole-school 'silent sitting' sessions backed up by a stillness ethos. I have seen many of them and the effect is staggering. It transforms the workplace. There is an opening here.

Modern Media

A website can unite an AM if set up creatively. It is necessary for a large number of people to have some instant control over the site with minimum fuss. Innovative features such as simple blogs, thought for the week, links to Advices and Queries and Quaker Faith and Practice are possible and all features of our AM website, designed by me. As a communication device for attracting attention and conveying basic information and what's on they are useful, but cannot replace experience and face to face communication. *(I would like to consider the website as part of the entry, but it may not maintain anonymity of my entry).*

Modern i-phones have incredible features for communication and instant high quality sound recording and video. This may be a useful tool for collecting testimonies without fuss. One meeting I know records Meeting for Worship and transcribes useful ministry to the newsletter.

Watford Quakers have taken advantage of YouTube, but more development is possible here, such as individual responses to ministry and to individual experience of stillness.

The Meeting House and its members

Let's say that a Meeting is successful in attracting a significant number of newcomers. How would a meeting respond if 10 new people walked through the door one Sunday? Is the welcoming framework in place? Are we organised in greeting new

people? Do we have something to offer newcomers outside meeting? Are members and attenders able to talk about spirituality, sensitively with newcomers, some of whom want to be left alone, some who want to know everything? I have been at meetings where no-one approached me and others where everyone comes to speak.

We can offer Quaker Quest, or a simpler version, which my LM calls Conversation or Exploration which allows newcomers more time to speak. We can offer 'Experiment with Light' and its application to living.

If our lives speak then that is enough as it will lead to a good experience for newcomers.

George Fox wasn't surprised and knew how to cope when numbers grew rapidly. There are many people out there who would like the spirituality of the Quaker way, but there may not be the understanding within a meeting to attract them.

Some Meeting Houses will inevitably have to be sold to free up resources for new or better locations, even if rented. Liverpool Meeting has done this.

I was asked to speak to MIND volunteers recently, on behalf of Quakers. As a result 5 new people came to Meeting for Worship and remain interested. All came to a Quaker workshop and want more. Proactive isn't a word to automatically attach to Quakers, but we could put ourselves forward to speak to groups.

Children are a difficult issue in meetings where currently there are none. The number of people necessary to cope with different age groups is significant, and requires registration with the new Independent Safeguarding Authority (formerly CRB checks). To present a regular programme for children is a substantial task. I have worked for an organisation promoting 'silent sitting' in schools. This term 'silent sitting' is used by the 'Education in Human Values' group for its frequent times of stillness. I believe children can cope with more silence and stillness than we think. We can teach them to talk about ethical issues from a Quaker perspective. The Quaker tapestry comes from one boy asking whether he could turn his pictures into a tapestry. We can be inventive in our work with children.

When my daughter was three, twenty years ago, we, the parents, were 'elderly' because she recited 'Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily life is but a dream'. I still see what she said as wholly appropriate and true ministry for a three year old. (We had explained to her about ministry in words she could understand). We have many challenges.

I have recently opened up the possibility of the three nearest AM's combining to provide the training needs of us all. Jordans Meeting is trying something similar. Woodbrooke can continue to support such ventures.

Conflict and Risk

Change will amplify any conflict in Meeting. We need to prepare for this. I have seen several AM's explode with conflict which can barely be contained. A group within a meeting who have the will to try new ideas are very likely to challenge the status quo. The more conflict I see the more present with it I become. I can stand back much of the time to help a situation (that is, I am an Elder). If expressed, conflict produces growth. Training in 'dealing with conflict' should be given to those interested. The still point can hold the turbulence. Are too many afraid of conflict? This is a vital part of development. The still point can hold this turbulence. Friends House have taken a financial risk in transforming the building for the future. (At least they had when this was first written. A few months later the plans have been withdrawn. This is disappointing in the context of this essay). There are personal risks to be taken towards simplicity and sustainability. Friends House has a part to play here, with communication being the key. Top down management can feel autocratic, bottom-up management can be vague. I personally sometimes don't read the myriad of minutes produced from committees even if I know where they are kept. I don't go to every committee meeting. Quakers used to have far more given to be read out as guidance in meetings, but I sense resistance to this today. The link between Local Meeting and Yearly Meeting, using Meeting for Sufferings, is key to the implementation of the framework.

Testimony

In my experience, many come to meeting because of our testimonies, especially that of peace. Examples are: Friends Ambulance Unit and our work helping Jews to escape Germany before World War 2. Some, like my mother, didn't approve when I became a Quaker because we were, in her eyes, 'Conscientious Objectors', a derogatory term for some. Many will come because of our strong stance on gay marriage, others will be appalled. I was at Meeting for Sufferings when gay marriage was discussed. There was division, until I felt that subside towards a strong minute. Our methods do work, they are our strength. Take it into the workplace and into schools.

Our testimony of sustainability and simplicity can become increasingly important to the Society of Friends if we can take a strong stance. Global Warming and the Credit Crunch have begun to change the attitude of the nation. The Quaker drama 'On Human Folly' is being developed to meet the needs of a wider audience.

Our lives are testimony too. Many Quakers offer their time freely to support prisoners, the mentally ill, the disadvantaged. This we can all do. What can you do?

There are dancers, painters, musicians who understand stillness. The Company of Elders dance group have Quaker links; the Leaveners and Plain Quakers are our performing wing. There are many ways to be open.

Eldership

'Sitting in the Fire' is a book by Arnold Mindell and recommended to me by Friends House. In it is an excellent summary of Eldership in the widest sense. We have Elders in our meetings, but are the national expectations for elders as high as those put forward by Mindell? Here is a selection:

'The leader follows rules; the elder follows the spirit.

The leader sees trouble and tries to stop it; the elder sees the troublemaker as a possible teacher.

The leader strives to be honest; the elder tries to show the truth in everything.

Leaders try to be better at their jobs; elders try to get others to become elders.

The leader needs time to reflect; the elder takes only a moment to notice what is happening.

The leader knows; the elder learns.

The leader needs a strategy; the elder studies the moment'.

We seek a diverse community of supportive individuals. Two phrases came up at our Elders meeting yesterday. 'We are all equally responsible for Eldership and greeting others' and 'We are all Elders in whatever situation we find ourselves'. Here lies the unity of community.

We can all become elders. Where are the elders? The early Quakers sent an Elder out with a travelling minister because 'holding the space' was so important.

National Bodies

We have Woodbrooke, Claridge House, Charney Manor, Friends House, Swarthmoor Hall and more. At least one of these is in danger of becoming financially unviable.

I have always preferred to run and facilitate rather than just attend. There are several others in my AM with this same mindset. We do go to day courses and weekend courses. We go to retreats. We go to Congenies, the Quaker centre in France. We have a significant fund to support this work.

It is possible to train several AM members in facilitation skills. This need not be expensive and it need not be overburdening. Elements of Quaker Quest and Experiment with Light can be combined, based on early Quaker process, in a very simple way to strengthen community and unity in a group. Everything is within. Be still wait..... allow..... be open..... trust. Speak our testimony, experience Meeting for Worship, share meals. The experience can be wordless. It can produce poetry, images, sound, movement, unity, revelation....tendering.....on minimum input from any one person. Others gain confidence and then have the confidence to lead a session. We call these 'conversations'; the word 'explorations' would also

work. They are not discussions. Such events have introduced 20 new people to Quakers this year in my own small LM. Some of them have stayed. Offer events only to members and attenders and people become overburdened. There are many people wanting what we offer. We have to find ways to contact them.

We need the proactive element to bring in people who are spiritual but not religious.

Innovative outreach can cause division, of 'them and us', of 'we don't do things that way'. Conflict will happen and risks must be taken.

Sharing experience is beginning to happen at National level in Meeting for Sufferings. This is exactly what is needed to implement the framework. The Framework for Action asks much of staff at Friends House. It is excellent. Get on with it urgently with our blessing, but communicate it clearly with as many as possible.

Joy

Quakers have a unique place within Christianity, but George Fox understood where humanity comes from (and returns to). Return to the root of what is and the base is the same. We can call it the still point, God, the absolute, Collective Consciousness, Buddha Nature, Tao, 'we are all one'. Whether that be Vedic, Aboriginal, Native American, African, Gnostic, Sufi, Christ, Buddha, George Fox, we have that one root, and its basic outpouring is joy, ananda, bliss. Oh what was lost in the persecution of all these groups of people! But the seed remains and George Fox was a flowering of that seed as if from nowhere. The seed produces a knowing, a creativity and intuition which may be about to flourish again. This is the evolutionary path; post-Darwin. Modern Science is beginning to agree. Quantum physics may be approaching the discovery understood from the beginning of time. There is no division, anywhere. We are all one at the still point, the rest we have all made up. This is the one truth.

Summary

This essay is not a set of remote ideas. In the AM's with which I have contact everything here has been experienced. There has been tremendous movement but also

frustration. We have an innovative website, we run the courses, we have the facilitators, we discuss the still point, we bring in new people (some of whom stay), we have conflict, we take risks, we are opening up and trusting. AM's are opening to new light.

60 people, individually or with committed assistance, working with Friends House or Woodbrooke, probably as volunteers, can make the changes. Such a pattern allowed the Society of Friends to grow over 400 years ago. I am offering to be one of those 60 today. Where are the other 59?

We can get back to a Quaker stance relevant to today.

The first half of the essay ended with mystical poetic symbolism. These are my own words to describe metaphysically where we may go as Quakers.

'Life is a magical wind which dances round the universe in play. Sometimes different winds meet in magic moments which are fleeting and gone for a time. This is pure unity in a world which seems diverse. At this time all that we are meets itself and questions itself. These are moments of insight. They are not for the mind, they are for all our senses, both inner and outer, working their magic together. This is true reality; we are fully awake.

When this magic moment passes we cry, because what we see as real is no longer so. What is real is known so clearly that nothing else seems to matter. We are so afraid of this moment that we cannot meet it head on for long. We prefer to bury ourselves in busyness so that we don't confront ourselves too closely.

It is beyond mind and time, for what are both but mere shadows of truth?

In you I see and feel something of that magic. It is beyond any words that I can find. I do not understand it.

We are the New Earth, challenging what is, being with things as they are, enjoying happiness and sadness as one. We are the future.

Yet we live on Earth, not in Heaven and we must seek ways to bring the qualities of Heaven to Earth in all our meetings. This is done through a deep presence with all people and things.

We can meet and be that magical wind which cannot be touched, only felt and experienced. That magical wind has many names. We know them in our hearts and not our words. We have the essence of life as it was meant from the start and to which it shall return. Bring that love in all that you are, dance with the spirit of that wind and be free, for nothing can keep it chained. Even in the hurricane we can find the still voice of calm from which the wind was born.

Fly away to that place of peace but keep rooted on Earth in the spirit of creation that is ours. Play with joy so that lives speak of the love that we have met in those fleeting magic moments.'

6000 + words

