A language for the inward landscape

The Willson Lectures 2017

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I. A language for the inward landscape: resources from our tradition.

From Woolman's journal:

I was led to think on the nature of the exercise which hath attended me. Love was the first motion, and thence a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they might be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them.

Beloved words, and so full of wisdom that they repay often revisiting, and serve for guidance in many conditions. But what do "concern," "feel," "leadings," or "truth" mean, and what sort of spiritual path is this? ¹

§1.

The title for these two lectures is "A Language for the inward landscape,"² but what I hope really to explore is how we try to put into words our encounter with the quicksilver life of the Spirit, as it flows in and through the grosser stuff of humans (among other creatures). So much of the delight, and the tragedy of our lives springs from the process of incarnation, the inhabiting of matter by Spirit — and where is the boundary? The artificial distinction of body/spirit is dissolved by the word and experience of Life, which connotes growth, suffering, generation, travail/travel, companionship, and delights both inward and outward. It is that life I long to

¹ All references cited are listed at the end of Lecture #2
² See A language for the inward landscape, by Brian Drayton and William P. Taber, published by the Tract Assoc. of Friends, 2015
experience as fully and freely as possible, to incarnate; and I long for you to do so as well.

In this session, I purpose to explore Quaker "language" as a key into the spiritual resources of the Quaker tradition. For it has long seemed to me that too many of us, upon reaching some plateau in our spiritual lives, turn quickly to resources outside Quakerism — Julian of Norwich, Thich Nhat Hanh, Carl Jung, the Mages of Quantum Theory, or what have you, for nourishment, and never take the time to see what there may be within Quakerism which might help, and in the use serve both to encourage fresh growth, and to enrich our experienced understanding of Quakerism as a spiritual path.

This seems like a good thing to talk about, but, Friends, I am here this weekend under a burden that we as a people, if we are a people, have mostly not yet learned what it means for us to be free in the Spirit, free children of the Light. After all, the Scriptures cannot any more be assumed to be a common point of reference among us; more and more of us are convinced Friends or otherwise deprived of Quaker enculturation; and even books of Faith and Practice are less and less regarded. While any of us can probably name individuals — even including themselves, perhaps — who are living free, have found a way to embody Gospel freedom, it does not appear to me that as a people we have accepted the gift that God has given us, keeps giving us. In part, at least, this may be owing to a too-facile acceptance of terms like "leading," "spirit," and "continuing revelation," and I believe that we thereby rob ourselves of a deep enough engagement with the dynamic work of Truth in and through us.

In New England, as elsewhere, Friends are feeling both energized and alarmed about the

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3 In 1982, as Darcy Drayton and I were returning by stages from the World Gathering in Kaimosi, I once spoke in worship in a meeting in England. Phrases from Scripture were woven into the message, as does happen sometimes. Afterwards, a local Friend thanked me for the message, and said that she supposed I must have some connection with Earlham or one of those places. I said, Well, no, but why do you say that? She said, Because you were quoting from the Bible.
condition of the world and while stirred in mind, heart, and soul there is a daily invitation to despair. We long to speak prophetically, "to be" (as Thomas Ellwood said of George Fox) "valiant for the truth, bold in asserting it, patient in suffering for it, unwearied in labouring for it, steady in testimony to it, immovable as a rock." Is our experience of life with the Spirit, and in it our unity across time and place with other Children of the Light, robust enough, convincing and convincing enough, transforming enough, to enable us to live as we long to?

To approach this topic, I think I need to retail just a little of my own experience, as a way to explicate what I mean by "spiritual resources," and, I suppose, what I mean by Quakerism. In this era, we are all syncretists to one degree or another, and part of the challenge I want to return to in my second talk is precisely the problems caused by our being a community of spiritual polyglots.

§2

Before ever I knew about religious practice, I encountered wonder. My earliest memory is of standing on the threshold of my family's barn, on a summer's day, and looking up into the big space, crossed by shafts of light coming through the roof and sides, and watching barn swallows, dozens of them, dipping and swinging through the air, in and around the bars of light, chattering and creaking, their little voices and effortless aerobatics completely enchanting.

From the sea that framed my childhood world, I learned something about the age of things, experienced an impersonal, speaking power that was wholly other, that was playground, pathway, graveyard of fishermen, endlessly in motion, and seemingly eternal, with quiet and mystery beneath what I could see.

As time passed, while the primeval joys and implications of nature did not pass away, the life of humanity more and more took center stage, and religion mattered then.
§3

Now, I started out in the Episcopalian way, where I came up in love, and learned from the devout theater of the liturgy, imbibing a sense of the Church as a great edifice and school for souls. The pastor of my childhood was a first pattern of piety — Anglo-Catholic flavored, he introduced me at a childish level to desert spirituality — and gifted with a good Anglican eloquence in expounding the Scriptures. But the Eucharist and baptism, seriously as I took them, said little to me as I sought to come to terms with my self, my identity, and the Vietnam war which was for me then the evident project of evil.

I was most deeply moved by the Stations of the Cross, enacted during Lent, followed by the explosive light and music of the Easter midnight mass. No one told me, as they might have, that in the Passion story and Easter joy I could have learned some of how the Eucharist, baptism, and the rest could speak very deeply to war, and to the finding of oneself. But at least I spent some time, half-aware, peeking through the gates of Gethsemane at what went on there. Words were not the issue, nor were they the solution to my need, though *story* was, and the enactment of salvation drama by individuals, and a Christ nearer than Jerusalem (as James Nayler once put it). Erasmus, that advocate of copious words, once remarked that in human communication words are not enough and that much must be conveyed by a speaking deed — *factum loquens*.

§4

Further along the "trail of life," as Rufus called it, under the impartial nurture of a Jesuit high school, and of a family friend whose mentorship shaped me as much as anything else, I
learned new things about the worth of words. I read the Gospels (not yet Paul), learned languages, and began to feel the power of poetry and of dialectic as a path of discovery — Plato's dialogues, the see-saw debates of historians, and the colloquies of Erasmus.

From my teachers and mentors (especially if I include my mentors-by-reading such as Merton, Erasmus, Gandhi), I could probably construct a sufficiently amusing portrait gallery of characters — a Hogwarts faculty — but the deep lesson from such portraits is how central is 

*personality*: how malleable, and yet how stubborn it can be, and how much control it exerts over one's understanding of the world. It took the Victorian Quakers, however, to teach me another aspect of the profundity of personality as a spiritual factor — what's given, what's developed as one forges a character, and how it can be transformed, when it willingly is inhabited by the personality of Christ— yet another face of incarnation, the intimate personal work of the Spirit.

We who are still sinners...are each of us not "one" but many. For looking at me is the face of one who is now angry, and then sad, and a little later happy, and then disturbed, at times concerned with the things of God and actions leading to eternal life, but shortly after doing things based on greed or the glory of this world....there are as many persons in him as there are customs...("Origen 281¶787")

And Erasmus helped me understand more: that our growth in the Gospel life depends in fact on our materiality, the gifts and costs of bodies, culture, and personality, as we collaborate with the inward work of Christ, whom he sometimes calls "Truth," to grow from our many-minded, divided selves, into unity.

Erasmus' morality was never a question of 'thou shalt not,' but rather it was 'thou shalt be conscious.' In this way, crucially, sin and even the flesh itself became an occasion of perfection. (Fitzpatrick pp 44-45).

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4 William James (in *A pluralistic universe*) lets us in on the dirty little secret that philosophers' personalities play a far greater role than anyone likes to admit in determining what they accept as a telling argument or satisfying conclusion.

Indeed, I learned much about the importance of maintaining the simplicity of the Gospel by my efforts to understand what Erasmus meant by the "philosophy of Christ." He picked this term up from the early Fathers, most likely Clement of Alexandria, but, gifted as he was in irony, saw with penetration that the "wisdom of God," (among other things a name for Christ) must not be construed or re-constructed after the fashion of secular philosophy, however valuable that enterprise may sometimes be. The philosophy is in fact the life of servant leadership, of humility and patience, of (to borrow a phrase) wearying out exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is contrary to that Wisdom whose delight is in creation, in healing, and in the breaking forth of the springs of Truth.

Erasmus believed that the true meaning of the Cross was that we had to save ourselves by dying to the world and our worldly bodies. For him, Christ, in one sense, was consciousness of the truth of human existence, it was like an inner voice that knew the way of salvation. We could only be perfected by acknowledging, and then following this inner voice. (Fitzpatrick pg. 32)

It was under such teachers that I was prepared to confront the Vietnam war, in my measure, and to see war in its context, as an emanation of the spirit in which our society dwells and takes its meaning, and counter to the Gospel life, and so I first caught a glimpse of the Lamb's War, though I did not as yet have such language for it.

§4

Accompanied, encouraged, and instructed as I was, I still had not had the experience being gathered into a fellowship or called into a church. Part way through high school, hints of a way forward came my way: my mentor, out of the blue, gave me a copy of Rufus Jones's final book, A call to what is vital, my first encounter with Quakerism at all; and around the same time I

6 From the Paraclesis, introductory to his edition of the Greek New Testament: "here is no requirement that you approach equipped with...many troublesome sciences. The journey is simple, and open to everyone. Only bring a pious and open mind, possessed above all with a pure and simple faith...This doctrine in an equal degree accommodates itself to all, lowers itself to the little ones, adjusts itself to their measure... bearing, fostering, sustaining them, doing everything until we grow in Christ." in Olin, pg. 100
learned that the only other non-Catholic in the school was a member of Portland Friends Meeting — but not living in the city, and relying only on hitchhiking for transport, I never was able to get there for a sample. Still, these hints came from people who knew before I did that I needed to find a people to belong to. I was showing signs of being gathered up.

When I went to college, however, I went on my first free afternoon to find the Quaker meeting (which turned out to be Friends Meeting at Cambridge), which was, I heard, just over there. It being a Saturday, nothing much was on view, but now I had a concrete proof that Quakers, whatever they were, were a going concern.

When I came into the silent assembly there, well, I felt at home, for sure — but rather than entering a soothing fellowship of united minds, I found myself in an energetic, intellectually chaotic community where tough questions were as much, actually more, valued than solid (if provisional) answers. So many names for God, so many practices, so many caveats. So much seeking, and so little patience or dwelling with the finding. Yet in the vulnerable, powerful worship, and in the meetings for business, something like real unity was felt to a surprising and delightful degree: "What? Is the Kingdom of God come to be with men?" (or words to that effect) — and somehow I had a feeling that this might be a function of the diversity of the fishes brought to land in the Spirit's net.

In that searching, pluralistic, sometimes distracted community I felt drawn into a common life. I also started to learn of the tradition of Quaker practice and of thought, and to understand, a little, the notion of "humble learner in the school of Christ."

I also was able in that freedom, and in those days of my apprenticeship as a scholar and as a Friend, to finally formulate two abiding questions:

1. What indeed is the gospel and how can I know it? And
2. How is the gospel to take effect in the world?

§5

I wanted to hear these answered in Quaker idiom— I didn't want to go haring off to another way, when there were hints and indications that Quakerism had depths that I as yet knew not. Such questions, however, were not easy to give voice to in those days, in those places, as far as I could tell. I was seen to be curious, however, and to take delight in the meeting as a home, so Friends responded with the two great tools for spiritual formation most often wielded by modern Quakers— committee appointments and recommended reading.

Committee work was both fun and instructive, but as an approach to my problems, haphazard at best. I read the favorite authors of the day, but I was not for them— Fox's journal, Howard Brinton, whose sage 300 years I was ill-prepared to benefit from; Thomas Kelly, who provided a feeling of vague uplift, with occasional flashes of guidance; John Woolman, less strange than Fox but still conveying a sense of authentic experience embedded in a distinctive culture. I was glad to find Rufus Jones's autobiographical trilogy, and was in a mood for Bildungsroman, but I needed more guidance, you might say now I need both story and a theoretical framework: How did my story fit with these, and how did all fit together?

When all my hopes of finding a Quaker path forward were frustrated, then, oh then, I had a few crucial encounters. I read Brinton's book on Quaker journals\(^7\), and a little beat-up copy of Bownas's *Qualifications Necessary to a Gospel Minister*\(^8\). Around the same time, the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder came to our Yearly Meeting, to talk about the *Politics of Jesus*,

\(^7\) Brinton 1974
\(^8\) now most easily available as Bownas 1989
and spoke of the Lamb's War. Excited, I asked him afterward what this was, and with a penetrating gaze he said, "It's your tradition! Go find out!" So I met James Nayler. These encounters opened the door to the realization that Quakerism possesses a treasury of complex, personal, unsystematic, yet powerful spiritual wisdom. Nayler connected inward, outward, personal and global, in a way that finally clicked, and helped me start to feel how all this was a way to understand my Big Questions: What is the Gospel, really, and how can it make a difference? I needed plainer words, first person accounts, which both told me what had happened, and what had changed in their lives and selves, and crucially, Why and How.

§6.

So I started reading journals, and also those powerful devotional works, the Braithwaite histories and Hugh Barbour's *Quakers in Puritan England*. I began to get a feeling for the great reservoir of experience that Bownas and Brinton synthesized, to read Woolman and others with more understanding, and to try to penetrate the life of the explosive First Generation. I began to reckon with a calling to teach and, well, to preach.

Then I met Bill Taber, whose talks on the Prophets and the Quaker connection, given at NEYM⁹, portrayed Quakerism as a practice and a discovery, and in the stream (the prophetic stream) of living revelation. I said to him, "I've been waiting all my life to hear someone speak like that," and unfazed he said, hearing a longing I had not until then really understood in myself, "Well, then, we'd better talk." When, a few months later, I told him I had been recorded as a minister, he gave a delighted smile, and over lunch we begin exploring how we might work together — and so I began another apprenticeship, of the sort that was a gift of his shared with

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⁹ Published as Taber 1984
many, and one that went deep. There followed a series of weekends at Pendle Hill for Friends in ministry, during which I heard for the first time Bill's phrase, "a language for the inward landscape," as we talked about the "technical language" or spiritual vocabulary of the Journals. Bill explored this language with care and love for many years.

§7

It is common enough to read that some worthy Friend, say, Fox, was not a systematic thinker or writer; that some others, like Nayler or Burrough, are more logical and organized in their thinking and writing; at least there's Barclay... We know that a coherent, systematic exposition can be a powerful tool for preaching & teaching; but we also know that this line of critique is missing something important, which is reflected in the Language for the inward landscape. It's not just that you can't put God or spiritual realities into words, though that is true.

The problem is that Quakers seek to live under the direct guidance and tutelage of the Spirit, and it is a direct, unmediated and dynamic relationship. This is hard to maintain, it turns out, because members of our species are inveterate, distractible constructors of concepts and groups of concepts and images, and before we know it, we have, as Nayler says, substituted words or ideas about Christ for the real thing, so that our "[spiritual] birth is a meaning instead of the life of Christ..." But the difficulty is even deeper, because this Spirit moves in ways and times that we comprehend imperfectly at best. It bloweth where it listeth. So attentiveness is at the root of the work, or, better, dwelling in watchfulness. This is not the same as the "mindfulness" of careful and disciplined attention to one's condition, actions, and surroundings. It is an active availability for instruction or instructions, coming from an Other whose influence

\[\text{10 in What the possession of the living faith is, in Naylor Works vol iv, pg. 88}\]
we can most easily describe in personal terms, however incorporeal and impersonal our reason
tells us this God person must be.

With interior experience being so essential to this relationship, we need to be careful
watchers, and avoid the natural delusion that "my will is Thy will." I have always taken
warning from the thought expressed in Psalm 50, where God says derisively, "Thou thoughtest
that I was altogether such an one as thyself." Idolatry is so easy to fall into! Yet if we fall into it,
we become inaccessible to the Spirit, or unperceiving of its motions.

Yet this Spirit wills us well — it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom of
Heaven — and Christ continues to perform one of the offices most important in the gospel
accounts of Jesus, which is that of teacher. Moreover, Christ teaches each of us in our present
condition and capacity — as Clement of Alexandria says in the Paidagogos, "The Instructor [that
is, the Word] being practical, not theoretical, His aim is thus to improve the soul, not to teach,
and to train it up to a virtuous, not to an intellectual life." As this growth goes forward, the
freedom of friendship is made possible, as we are changed so that "Thy will becomes my will."

§8

Friends tend to speak differently to insiders, that is, those who share the Quaker
experience, than they do to outsiders, who are ignorant of or perhaps hostile to Quakerism as
they understand it. (There is an interesting possible parallel to explore between this difference,
and the development of public vs. retired meetings for worship in the first decades of the
movement). Given the difference we all can attest between how it feels to do what we do,
versus how we explain our actions, it is no wonder that when Friends are put under the
searchlight of challenge, cast by theologically acute critics, the results are of mixed success, and
there is a small steady lament which recurs in certain intellectual circles (starting at least with A.R. Barclay) that Friends have never really worked things out theologically, even though the movement produced (and still produces) beautiful lives and courageous hearts.

But when Quakerism arose, the message was not, "Here's how to refresh old structures and accounts of Christianity." Rather, the message was, "Christ says, Come! With his power and his guidance we follow." The whole work of a Christian, says Penington, is to know Christ, and live out that relationship, which means to walk a path of transformation, learning what the Witness Light finds in our hearts, and under the paradoxical methods of the servant Lord, the conquering Lamb, to grow to allow Truth to arise and have dominion. This is apprenticeship, it is pedagogy, it is the conversation between material and artisan, the life of a pilgrim or of an explorer of an inward-outward landscape.

The resources you need on such a journey include guidance to help you keep oriented towards your destination; advice about inward and outward weather and environmental conditions; troubleshooting, and, crucially, how to manage this as part of a body of many members, whose connection is mystical, and whose autonomy is never compromised, either by each other, or by the Spirit, that takes its kingdom with entreaty, and keeps it by lowliness of mind. Neither roadmap, nor blueprint, the companionship with the Inward Teacher, Monitor, and Shepherd consists of a process of diagnosis, analysis, and guidance for one following an opening way, which takes its very shape in the act of following it (and indeed can only do so as we make the attempt). And it's we who are being shaped, as our path takes shape: We are both traveler and landscape, co-workers and raw material, and in the process of losing our self as we go further on this landscape, it is given back, with our individuality gradually prepared for consecration.

Now let us hurry to receive the heavenly manna, for in the mouth that manna takes on the taste
each one wants... Just as the quality of food in the nursing mother changes into milk according to the nature of the infant, or is modified by the physician according to what is beneficial for a sick person, or is prepared for a stronger person of greater vigor, so, too, does God change, according to each one's needs, the power of the Word, which has the function of nourishing the human soul... and the Word is by no means false to its own nature when it becomes food for each according to the capacity of each. (Origen 265-6, ¶¶728-9)

We can gain comfort, insight and inspiration in this journey from other wayfarers, in narrative, and in indications which bring both the weight of an individual's experience, and additional dimensions of engagement which allow us to connect with the mind, with the imagination, with the heart, as well as the soul. Indeed, it is with the Journals as with the Scriptures, or the ministry in a meeting for worship: We get benefit from them to the extent that we receive them in the spirit in which they were given, so that they become a means of our participation and experience. In this process, it is good to seek physical, Biblical, as well as "Quaker" echoes and nuances.

§9

In the first place, we must be brave enough to admit that our goal, as Friends have always understood, is holiness. Of course this can be named in different ways —righteousness, perfection, faithfulness, salvation, or "rest." (as in Matthew 11)

Where art thou? Art thou in thy soul's rest? Dost thou feel the virtue and power of the gospel? Dost thou feel the ease which comes from the living arm, to the heart which is joined to it in the light of the gospel? Is thy laboring for life in a good degree at an end? And dost thou feel the life and power flowing in upon thee from the free fountain? Is the load really taken of from thy back? Dost thou find the captive redeemed and set free from the power of sin, and the captivity broken... by the redeeming power, which is eternal? Hast thou found this, or hast thou missed of it? Let thine heart answer.

(Penington, vol 2: 202-3)

When first I was aware of my spiritual life, I was told to aspire to be a "good person." But what did that mean? Like young people in every generation, I could see how people who were esteemed in my community, and even in my church, betrayed serious flaws or struggles, or wounds, which shaped the way they treated others, the way they used "the creatures," the goals they strove for, and the achievements they valued. When I later came among Friends, I did not
hear much at all about the destination, or directionality, of the spiritual journey. I heard advice to "live up to the light that you have," or to "be faithful," but this language did not convey much to me about growth and development. I was not hoping for some ladder of attainment or initiation; on the other hand, I did want to hear about what it might mean to mature spiritually.

The Quakerism that I have mostly encountered is resolutely democratic, And leveling. Where this militates against the glorification of individuals, it seems healthy. But it also robs us of any understanding or discernment about spiritual authority. It makes an idol of comfort, and disguises the very reality that we can grow in our capacity to follow the light. After all, if Christianity is a practice, it is reasonable to assume that with practice we will get better at the skills, the understanding the wisdom associated with this practice. Doesn't practice make perfect? Penington again (later in the passage cited above):

The gospel state is a state of substance, a state of enjoying the life, a state of feeling the presence and power of the Lord in his pure, holy Spirit, a state of binding-up, a state of healing, a state of knowing the Lord, and walking with him in the light of his own Spirit. It begins in a sweet, powerful touch of life, and there is a growth in the life (in the power, in the divine virtue, in the rest, peace, and satisfaction of the soul in God) to be administered and waited for daily.

§ 10

Of course, the point is not my growing up, but Christ growing in me. Quaker language has much to offer in this regard, and the most notable word perhaps is "seed." In the uses of this word we find important indications for the spiritual practitioner — whether novice or long-experienced, for indeed the disciplines of Christ are to preserve in essentials the condition of a child, which in one who is no longer a child in years will include poverty of spirit, readiness to mourn and to comfort the mourner, to long for and be available to reconciliation, to ask for what we need, accept what we are given with joy. Friends warn us to experience the seed as something little, tender, weak, and oppressed in darkness by the earth, even though in these little
appearings it is yet the presence and action of God's power, which we might be too ready to disdain:

the great deceiver of souls lifts up men's minds in the imagination to look for some great appearance of power, and so they slight and overlook the day of small things, and neglect receiving the beginning of that, which in the issue would be the thing they look for. Waiting in that which is low and little in the heart, the power enters, the seed grows, the kingdom is felt and daily more and more revealed in the power. And this is the true door and way to the thing: take heed of climbing over it. (Penington vol 1:125)

This is both helpful and challenging. It is helpful because it is concrete: Look for small motions, little openings, and do not look for or trust large "overturnings" or apparent sudden leaps to a new spiritual stature. As Samuel Neale says,

Let us keep to the feeling, let us travail with the seed, that we may know its arising in dominion; and then let us do what is shown us. (S. Neale, Journal, pg 11).

This is at the core of the work we do in worship, to wait until we are clear enough to perceive where the little sweet growing thing is. This is the Spirit, deeper than words, which helps us breath toward the divine life, and as we come into an awareness of its presence, we are enabled to conquer new territory, the life rises up, as Friends say, into dominion — not complete, not utter, because we are vessels in preparation, babes taking nourishment, children asking the divine Parent for bread; and that Seed is also the first opening of Christ's resurrection in your body and mine, in the bodies of his saints.

..all wait patiently in the power of the Lord.... that in the seed ye may be kept which is heir of the power...For that is it which will keep you out of the changeable things, and present your minds, souls, and spirits to the Lord; and there the seed comes up which is heir of the power, and of the wisdom which is pure from above... And your growth in the seed is in the silence, where ye may all find a feeding of the bread of life. (Fox, ep. CLXXI)

Knowing that power, we then wait to see our measure, taking our measure from what we can
compass in action, and gain strength from our faithfulness thus far:

let your food be in the life of what you know, and in the power of obedience rejoice, and not in what you know, but cannot live (Nayler *Works* iv: 155)\(^\text{11}\)

Now, Friends from the beginning used "seed" in another sense. Fox and some others had in mind that "seed of the woman," the "royal seed," that will struggle with, and overcome, the "seed of the Serpent" (Gen. 3:15). identified very often with the "seed of Abraham," so *Seed* refers to "descendants," or to "a people sharing common parentage." These descendants are gathered by God's work into a shared relationship with the Father, brothers and sisters in the Spirit, and thereby sharing a common life:

To all the Seed of Abraham ... who are of the offspring of David, and of the Church of the first-born; who are the first fruit unto God; ye royal offspring of the Rock of Ages, who have come out of the everlasting washing, my dear brethren, called Quakers, who have eaten your bread with fear and trembling, whom your brethren have cast out; Oh how I love you; my soul is knit unto you; my heart and life breathes after you; I am one with you in suffering and in joy.

Howgill, 1678, pg. 28\(^\text{12}\).

Writing from prison, during a time of intense persecution, William Dewsbury declares the stubborn endurance of this "royal seed," and calls upon his brothers and sisters to remember the sweetness of God's working, and the fellowship of all those who are of the royal seed:

Oh, you child of the morning of the pure eternal day of the God of Israel, hearken no longer to the enemy, who said, there has none traveled where you are [traveling,] neither drunk of the cup that you are drinking. He is a liar, who goes about to destroy your precious soul. In the word of the Lord God, I declare unto you, I drank the same cup, with my faithful friends, who are born of the royal seed, every one in their measure have traveled in the same path, and have endured the same temptations, and walked in the light of the same sparks, and lain down in sorrow, in the sense of the same misery as you mourn under this day. No longer lend an ear unto the enemy, and to the thoughts of your heart. Arise, arise, in the light of the covenant, and stay your heart; and the Lord God, he will throw down the enemy of your peace. (Dewsbury, from York Castle, 1661)

\(^{11}\) *Milk for babes, and meat for strong men*

\(^{12}\) "The first general epistle written to the Camp of the Lord."
By extension, *seed* can refer to a group of souls gathered, or ready to be gathered. Ministers sometimes felt or saw this seed to be visited with encouragement, and in their writings about it, more than one meaning of *seed* can be heard:

I was favored with a secret evidence, that the Lord had a seed on that isle, which he designed to visit, and bring to the knowledge of himself, I was therefore thankful that resignation was wrought in me, to obey his will in going there[.]. (Routh 202)

This brings real consequences for living in the Spirit: both the seed-as-growing-point and seed-as-people convey the unity of the life flowing through all who come to it, acknowledge it, and feel its condition in themselves and others. It is not your seed or mine, for we are all of one seed, and in the stillness of all flesh we feel how the Seed at the last is also our meeting place and bond. Hence, Friends have seen the process of "sinking down to the Seed" as both an arrival at a place of peace, and as a way to see where God's Wisdom is at the work of creation, compassion, and witness. This is how I make sense of the moment in John's Gospel when Jesus said, "My peace I give you, not as the world gives": Here is a little glimpse into the experience of God, in whom peace and dynamism are both at the center.

[The Lamb] having kindled the fire and awakened the creature, and broken their peace and rest in sin, he waits in patience to prevail to recover the creature and stay the enmity by suffering all the rage and envy, and evil entreatings that the evil spirit that rules in the creature can cast upon him, and he receives it with meekness and pity to the creature, returning love for hatred, wrestling with God against the enmity with prayers and tears night and day, with fasting, mourning, and lamentation, in patience, in faithfulness, in truth, in love unfeigned, in long suffering, and in all the fruits of the spirit, that if by any means he may overcome evil with good, and by this his light in the eye of the creature that the eye may come to be opened.... And thus he in his members many times wrestles and preaches to the spirits in prison, with much long suffering towards the world, a nation, or a particular person. (Nayler Works iv:4)13

Thus Nayler, but Friends for long understood that we are called to practice this radical paradox,

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13 *The Lamb's war against the man of sin.*
of centering on the Presence, and, for the love of Truth, allowing Truth to confront and transform ourselves until we both feel and can live a unity with the Seed in all, and to grow into willingness to serve that Seed. Peter Yarnall says: "it is a mercy inexpressible, when made willing to suffer with the seed," and Mary Neale:

They met with low times and seasons, deep baptism of spirit; they travailed for and with the seed, and at times were set at liberty in the authority and power of Truth, to minister to the various, classes of the people. (M. Neale, Journal, pg. 76).

**Feeling and knowing**

"Oh, that you that read me could feel me!" exclaims William Penn.

One of the things that Friends have often been accused of, and indeed must be careful about, is mistaking our own preferences, impulses, tastes, and compulsions as motions of the Spirit. From the beginning, Friends claimed that anyone could (subject to God's gift and present action) know the will of God for them, and indeed at times, for others, even to the nations, in a way that many of their contemporaries found ridiculous, delusional, and dangerous (to the soul and to the nation). Unquestionably, God's will in general terms, and in essentials, was expressed in the Scriptures, and in certain respects in creation, but both creation and Scripture required interpretation, and neither was a device well-suited to answering today's specific questions — "Shall I take this job? Should I write this bill of sale for a slave? Is this the ship I should travel to America on?"

It is all very well for someone to talk about their spiritual growth with language like "Now the Lord did gently lead me along...", with reference to interior events which might be consequential (for good or ill) for the individual soul; it is quite another thing to say something like this:

Then I concluded to go to London and take some employment amongst Friends; and something was very forward in me so to do; but yet the Lord would not suffer me, but counselled me to stay
and wait, until he called me forth. So I waited a season, and at length the word of the Lord came unto me, which said, Thou shalt go forth into the south to be a witness unto my name, for which thou shalt suffer many things; but I will be with thee. (Ambrose Rigge, *Friends Library* vol 12 pg. 188)

Anyone who talks like that is raising some threatening questions — What makes you privy to God's will? What gives you any standing to judge whether some notion that comes into your head is divine guidance? Since when is God going about raising up witnesses, the way he once did in the prophets' time, or Apostolic times, after which it has been most comfortable to conclude that prophecy has ceased? Won't this kind of thing lead to total subjectivity, individualism, and chaos?

Now, the controversies and wranglings that ensued in the 1600s, and keep emerging among us even now, are probably not worth rehearsing here at this time, and I think any practicing Friend will understand them experimentally. The upshot was, however, that Friends emerged from all this roil with a fixed confidence in "the direct, immediate, and perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit," as the NCYM(C) discipline still puts it.

How shall this be known? Friends developed an extensive practice of "feeling" which has never been foolproof, and yet is indispensable. This particular Quaker sense of feeling is a kind of knowing, a moment of clarity on a specific point, a heightened or intensified awareness of a situation, condition, or fact. We can say that when we come to the center where we are able to perceive the divine life, the inward teacher in action, we have come down to the place that knows. From agreeing that "I am easy with this minute," in a meeting for business, to holding back from an action because you feel a "stop in the mind," to having a sense of God's purpose taking shape, possibly including you in what is to come, either as herald,
as participant, or as a Joshua, upholding in prayer, Friends have received guidance, as part of the wisdom from above. We have also learned to act without knowing the consequence, though welcome evidence that the choice was right has not been wanting in many cases.

Of course, "feelings" can have many origins, and we can very well "feel" certain about something in which we are quite mistaken; Quaker annals are full of such cautionary tales. Discernment must include both "feeling" and thinking, often very shrewd thinking. As Hugh Barbour wrote, "Early Friends faced the daily job of recognizing the true from the subjective when they were led to speech and action. From Jeremiah's time to the present, men have known no absolute or easy way to tell a genuinely divine message from wishful impulses and false prophecy." (Barbour, n.d., pg 1).

How to keep up the daily watch, the daily feeling after life? Many Friends can give a valuable account of their practices, and there are usually more than one, because listening to the Light both gets easier with practice, and yet requires always being a beginner, since every day is a fresh one, and our inward weather is so changeable. It is very fruitful to talk with your Friends about their practice, if people get centered and in the place of trust feel free to acknowledge both how little or how much they do to maintain that state. Here are some glimpses of one person's repertoire, to encourage your own exploration and conversation with Friends.¹⁴

First, the quick inward retirement—a momentary pause, a brief period of mindfulness, in which God and the decision are both in my awareness. If no prohibition arises, I feel free to proceed as seems best upon other considerations. I imagine that this is the commonest way

¹⁴ This, of course, refers only to individual discernment; community discernment includes various forms, though these individual practices underlie many of them.
Friends "check in" during the day, and it was discovered early among us. Hugh Barbour writes of it as part of the daily practice of Quakers even in the early period: "In some ordinary activities, no special guidance was looked for, and it was enough that Friends found within themselves no contrary balks or 'stops to their minds.'" (Barbour 1964, 114) This is the kind of listening that I try to do at work and around the house, and it can be a powerful if very simple tool for noticing places where I have allowed myself to become encumbered to the impairment of my spiritual health. A description of this in action that I love, concerns Loveday Hambly, a busy innkeeper:

Under many trials and sufferings she was very valiant and cheerful; she had a great family and God gave her a great measure of wisdom to order it. Her tables were plentifully spread and she took great care that all might have sufficient and that none of the good creatures which God had given her should be abused or wasted. Many times in the day as she had opportunity she retired to her closet and many times came out amongst her family in a cool and tender frame of spirit as one whose strength was inwardly renewed. (Coale 1844)

Second, what one might call "sanctified debate." By this phrase I mean simply taking time to become deeply aware of the Presence, and then undertaking an intentional meditation and reflection on the decision, perhaps over many days. This allows my reasons pro and con to be examined in the consciousness of my deepest commitment, and thus to allow the Light to a certain degree to search my motives, fears, and hopes. I may find then that I refrain from something, because I see that to act on it on the basis of my most prominent motives would be a betrayal, large or small, of my sense of the divine truth that I have; or would serve to harden me against something that is uncomfortable but important—something that is making me less tender (and here I might include even just too much busyness).

Finally, "seeking the opening way." I have sometimes found that when I sit with a decision, there is no prohibition or stop that directs my choice (by eliminating an alternative). Nor do my reasonings produce clarity. If I feel I must act, then I have found it good to wait until I feel a path opening as I look in one direction or another, and a sense of release or freedom when I
contemplate taking that route. Then, even if I feel doubts or concerns, unless these intensify, I go ahead in trust. Bill Taber sometimes said that when faced with a choice, he would wait to feel which alternative had "more light on it." John Churchman, in his journal, speaks of this practice as well. Under Bill's influence, I have paid attention to this sense of light when in the throes of a decision; but it is laborious and forced if I have not been keeping up the daily watch.

Yet it is not only that we receive and then act. In our acting, or not, as the Spirit guides us, we receive affirmation or rebuke. We might say that it is the quality of the life that seems to open, under one option or another, that gives us the foundational guidance. Nayler writes:

> It is the like of gentleness, meekness, patience, and all other virtues which are of a springing and spreading nature, where they are not quenched, but suffered to come forth to His praise in His will and time, who is the Begetter thereof, and to the comfort of His own Seed, and cross to the world.

(Nayler, "How Sin Is Strengthened" in *Works*, iv, p. 30.)

Wrapped up in a statement like this are several elements of this quality: truthfulness, even if in tension with our preferences or our self-image; gentleness, meekness, comfort, but also springing and spreading: growth and outward action, which has an integrity because of growing from within, in continuity with the divine Life.

Penington warns, "Do not seek to be more than God would have you be." You do not have to look far for examples in the journals of those who, no doubt meaning well, aspired to insight without exercising sufficient discernment or patience, and a desire to hasten to a condition that may seem exalted but is buttressed by insufficient substance. A quotation I love, from the journal of John Gratton, both makes clear Gratton's judgment, and the charity which can accompany such evaluation, rooted in the knowledge of how hard this all is:

> Dear friends, let those alone who think they fly into the third heavens, and run into high things, great sights, and deep mysteries; yet love them, and seek peace as much as in you lies. And if any are offended at you, because you see not what they pretend to, bear it patiently, for they ought not so to be; the apostle Paul did not so, but became all things to all, seeking to gain all to Christ
Jesus; even so do all who abide in the same spirit to this day. John Gratton, Epistle to Friends in Pennsylvania.

We are rightly cautious about of sudden insight and spiritual accomplishment, and yet if we are honest, we know that sudden change, too, is an important part of a lively internal life, and once again rules of thumb, the discerning heart and shrewd mind, are more valuable as cultivators of fresh life than rules about seasoning or process can be. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and so is every one born of the Spirit.

In closing this talk, and preparing for the next one, I want to revisit one of the most important, and most challenging phrases, and practices, available to us seeking to live in the freedom and lawfulness of the Gospel: Living in the Cross.

The Cross, and Living in it.

The Cross: I know Friends who have been Christian, who have despaired at the challenge of rescuing the Cross from the evils done under its sign. I know Friends who are allergic to any mention of the Cross, seeing it as the symbol of oppression. I was once rebuked by a Friend who was pained that I would mention the shameful things that had been done in Christ's name, and under the sign of the Cross.

In retreats on the "Language of the inward landscape," the session on Living in the Cross is usually the hardest, and most productive, eliciting as it does a range of wounds, misgivings, and questions, as well as affirmations. This bitter-sweet mixture is our condition, and in part explains why so many Friends are glad to embrace one or another relativization of Christ which avoids the issue of the Cross completely.

One study group\textsuperscript{15} says,

We look to Jesus, along with many other great figures throughout the ages, as wisdom figures, teachers of love and compassion,

\textsuperscript{15} New Story Group (2014)
and works to develop a panentheistic account which avoids any version of the Cross, but keeps its focus steadfastly on a vision of convergence between an idealized Science and an idealized Religion. A model of divine-human dynamics which sees an inevitable evolution towards universal harmony can rescue Christ from the consequences of centuries of Christian malfeasance and disgrace by just avoiding the Cross altogether.

From the point of view I am taking here, however, which construes Quakerism as an active relationship with the Spirit, such an abstraction, whatever its attractions, is no help in the daily dialogue with the Living One who calls and accompanies — whereas the Cross, as lived by Friends, is a very real help, and indeed represents an indispensable process and practice. The key is in the phrase "living in the cross," common among Friends from the beginning, with variants such as "it was in the cross to me."

Of course, this language in part echoes Jesus' injunction to his followers to take up their cross and follow him. But Friends have understood that the transformation of self requires endings, choices, departures, and sacrifices, all arrived at by a process that includes learning, grief, and boundary-crossing. It is easy with a superior grin to accuse the earnest of a belief that "whatever hurts must be good for me," but the plain fact is that the stronger the resistance is to a change that seems necessary, the more importance is connected with the challenge. Moreover, will power is not usually enough: something more is needed, and Friends came to know that the power that brought them to such a stand was also at work to enable the change. Here is Richard Farnsworth, already deeply possessed of this experience in the earliest years of the movement, to Margaret Fell and her household, employing at least three nuances of "the cross":

“Ah! My dear hearts, prize the love and mercy of the Lord, and daily mind your growth into that which is eternal: and the everlasting love and power of the Lord keep you all in faithfulness to Him in what you know. Keep in the cross, and purity will grow; -- the safest way is in the cross: take up the cross daily; mind that which crosseth your own wills, and it will bring every idle word, thought, and deed to judgement in you; and so the old man will be crucified, with the affections and lusts thereof; and you shall find the Lord to sit as a refiner, to judge out all the old leaven, the old nature; and so the new man will be raised up…” (Richard Farnsworth to Margaret Fell (and household) 1652. in Barclay 1847, pg. 434)
Bill Taber often talked about the experience of living in the Cross, and of his discovery of the Cross of Joy. At one point, he "translated" the old language thus:

"living in the cross is, first of all, being keenly alert to the highest reality we know, in every moment, so that we are able to choose, microsecond by microsecond, the attitude and action most in line with the will of God. Living in the cross is akin to "nonattachment" because in this state of alertness we can be given the grace and the self-discipline to give up our own will, our own attachments, and our own prejudices through the incredible grace of God manifested through Jesus Christ. Living in the Cross of Joy is not a one-time experience. It is life-long and is an important symbol of soul’s journey in this earthly life. Most of us keep learning throughout our lives about what this cross really requires in terms of personal growth and personal change." (Drayton and Taber 2015, pg. 61, from Taber 2002 pg. 10)

And I tried to gloss this thus:

To live in the Cross is a place of rejoicing and creation, because one passes through death to a newness of life, and in one’s own measure and sphere participates in the drama of salvation whose great signs are Calvary and the empty tomb, but whose experience is the Lamb’s war as you and I can live it, the growth in freedom and the experience of the power of love to remove fear and its oppressive kin. The source of the joy and liberation is the experience of the Presence, ever less veiled, which brings judgment and healing, establishes perspective, tends to humility and patience, strengthens compassion, and enriches our ability to perceive and rejoice in beauty, purity, and mercy—and just as keenly to perceive and reject self-inflation, possessiveness, defensiveness, grudge-holding, injustice, and anything that takes us out of earshot of the Shepherd’s voice. (Drayton 2007, pp. 21-2)
§ Final

We aim to be, claim we are, a body gathered by the Light, whose most central act is the meeting for worship, and who seek to follow the leadings of the Spirit. In the companion lecture, I will reflect on the terms contained in that sentence, so important and so disputed: Light, Spirit, Body, and Worship.