

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING

GUNPOWDER FRIENDS MEETING NEWS, Web Edition for June, 2021

SIMPLICITY



QUERIES:

Am I aware that the ways in which I choose to use my time, my possessions, my money, and my energy reflect my most deeply held values?

What am I ready to release so that I can give my attention to what matters most?

What in my present life most distracts me from God?

ADVICES:

The testimony of simplicity is like a bell that calls us to an awareness of the Center. It challenges us to ask "What matters?" It reminds us that much of what worries us and stresses us is not important. It asks us to recognize the burdens we carry needlessly and to lay them down: our anxiety about our appearance, our struggle to afford what we do not need, comparisons between our lifestyle and the lifestyles of others, squabbles born of tension and stress, worries that leave us exhausted and unable to find time for what matters in our lives.

VOICES:

'Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free 'Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be
And when we find ourselves in the place just right, We will be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend we will not be ashamed; To turn and turn will be our delight
Till by turning, turning we come 'round right.

-Shaker spiritual

The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.
-Han Hoffmann, 1952

I saw that a humble man, with the Blessing of the Lord, might live on a little, and that where the heart was set on greatness, success in business did not satisfy the craving; but that commonly with an increase of wealth, the desire for wealth increased. There was a care on my mind so to pass my time, as to things outward, that nothing might hinder me from the most steady attention to the voice of the True Shepherd.

-John Woolman, c. 1744

As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler; solitude will not be solitude, poverty will not be poverty, nor weakness weakness.

-Henry David Thoreau, c. 1850

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GUNPOWDER FRIENDS MEETING



MINISTRY &
COUNSEL

FROM MINISTRY & COUNSEL:

SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 2021, 11:30-12:30 AM: FORUM: LOVE IN ACTION

We will hear from civil rights legend John Lewis using excerpts from an audiotaped *On Being* interview of John Lewis by Krista Tippett entitled "Love in Action". This interview explores the spiritual basis and practice of non-violent direct action used in the civil rights movement. In our forum we will play excerpts from the interview followed by a time of response in a worship sharing format. For those who would like to listen ahead of the forum, here is a link to the entire interview and transcript: <https://onbeing.org/programs/john-lewis-love-in-action/#transcript>.

May 31st: **Memorial Day Meeting for Worship for Remembrance** (11:00 - 12:00 in person at the Meetinghouse and via Zoom). *See complete information and photo on page 11.*

Anchoring Worship at the Meeting House:

If Friends would like to anchor Meeting for Worship at the meetinghouse, advance notice is no longer required. Just come, and observe distancing and other COVID-19 protocols.

GUNPOWDER FRIENDSHIP NIGHTS, WEDNESDAYS, 7-8PM, VIA ZOOM:

Looking for a lighthearted way to stay connected with Gunpowder Friends during this time of physical distancing? **Join us each Wednesday evening from 7-8 via Zoom.** You can drop in for a few minutes or stay the hour. The Clerk will send out a link each week.

YOU ARE INVITED!: On Saturday, June 26, 2021, Gunpowder's First Day School will be hosting a gathering of our beloved community (open to all!) at the Schmaljohn's Meadow from 4 PM until dark or your bedtime, whichever comes first!

Join us for an outdoor, socially distanced event, with plenty of space for beloved little ones (bipedal or quadri-paw-ed) to run around. Bring your own dinner and drinks, and a dish or snack to share if you wish. (Potluck participation is based on your level of Covid caution/comfort, and we will have single-use and cleaning supplies like wipes on hand.) Come help us celebrate our FDS youngsters who are graduating this year or moving up in school. Let the Summer begin!

Prison Pen Pal Opportunity:

If you would like to be a Prison Pen Pal, contact John List at iahr.jlist@gmail.com. John is from the Interfaith Action for Human Rights, <https://www.intervaihtactionhr.org>. Most of the prisoners who are looking for pen pals through IAHR are those convicted of felonies in DC. People convicted of felonies in DC are sent to one of the 122 Federal facilities operated by the Bureau of Prisons across the US. Because of this, many of them are very far away from family members and receive no visitors. *Tracy Haidar*

FROM CARE AND OVERSIGHT:

Thank you, Gunpowder Friends for the care, love, and ministry you generously share with one another. We remind everyone that C&O is available to coordinate community support for those in need and to organize Clearness or Support Committees. What is a Clearness Committee? Here's an excerpt from *BYM Resource for Faith & Practice* 2013 (p. 16):

A more formal practice that is particularly identified with Quakerism is the Clearness Committee: a group of Friends to hear your concerns, to listen to the difficulties confronting you, to help you venture deeper within in your search for clearness.

Ordinarily a Clearness Committee is appointed when a person in the Meeting seeks to reach clarity on how to respond to a concern or dilemma. Clearness Committees have been used when a person applies for membership and when a couple seeks marriage under the care of the Meeting. But beyond these traditional events it can be helpful for you to bring your leadings, your questions, your discoveries to the wider community for testing.

As Parker Palmer remarked, "Behind the Clearness Committee is a simple but crucial conviction: *each of us has an inner teacher, a voice of truth, that offers the guidance and power we need to deal with our problems.* But that inner voice is often garbled by various kinds of inward and outward interference. The function of the Clearness Committee is not to give advice or 'fix' people from the outside in but rather to help people remove the interference so that they can discover their own wisdom from the inside out."

Virtual Coffee Hour, Sunday 6/6/21, at Rise of Meeting:

Care and Oversight Committee invites you to stay online at the rise of Meeting on the first First Day of each month for some casual social time. We meet in small groups using Zoom breakout rooms, and Friends find that this is a wonderful opportunity to catch up and learn more about each other. (BYO coffee, tea and/or snack.)

Memorial Day Meeting for Worship and Remembrance
Gunpowder Friends Meeting, Outdoors and via Zoom
May 31, 2021, 11AM EDT



Friends are invited to join in person or via Zoom Gunpowder Monthly Meeting's annual **Memorial Day Meeting for Worship and Remembrance**. This year's date is May 31st. We gather at 11 AM on the Monday holiday. Due to unabated coronavirus pandemic, masks and vaccination are recommended, and Friends will worship outdoors on the west porch; for Zoom participants, a camera will be trained on the burial ground during the hour; the welcome and any vocal ministry will be offered to that camera. In lieu of potluck lunch held in "normal times," Friends are invited to bring their own simple lunch for a time of fellowship. Additional details, a brief history of this Gunpowder tradition, and Zoom link will be provided by Clerk's E-mail.

One beat at a time!

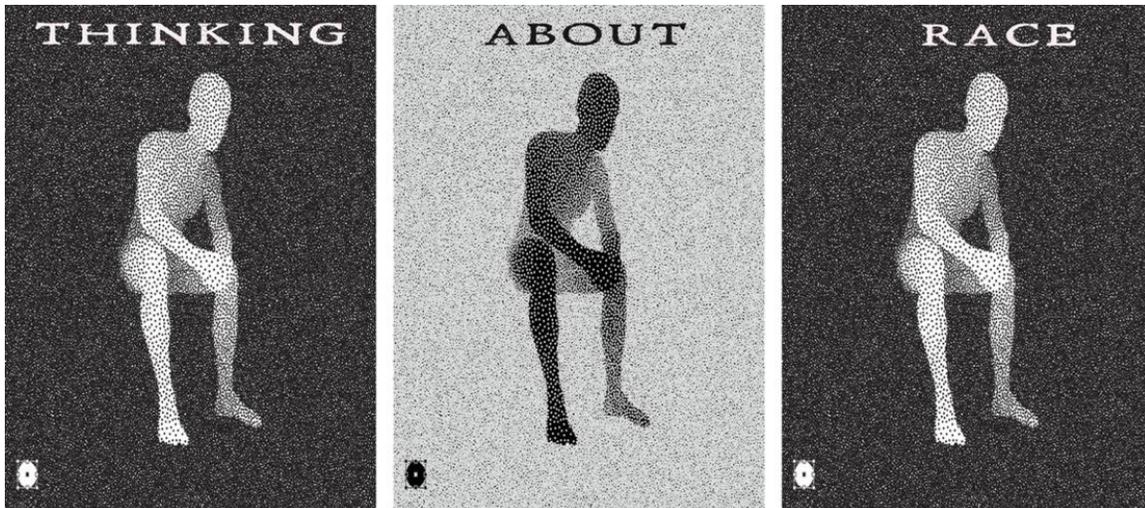
Hi everyone,

I am seeking to deepen my connections with Friends through offering drumming. I have been drumming for many years and certified in Beginner West African Rhythm instruction. I Love to drum and to create connections through rhythm by tapping into the rhythmic spirit that resides in us all. If you are interested in drum circles or learning some West African Rhythms, please let me know.

The groups can be focused on healing, meditation, West African Rhythms or all of the above! Drums can be provided. The more the rhythmic merrier.

Julie Evonna
803-644-8930
julieevonna@gmail.com





Thinking About Race (June 2021) – “The personhood of Whites ... the burden of their bias.”

“White people in America tend to assume, at a deep level, that America’s economic, governmental and legal systems are roughly fair. This, after all, is how people such as me generally experience them. And this allows for facile, sometimes unconscious, judgments. Because American systems seem fair, it must be individuals’ fault when they are poor, powerless or imprisoned.

“It is a failure of imagination that leads to the persistence of injustice. People for whom the system works have a hard time understanding the lasting, disastrous economic consequences of centuries of stolen labor, or the continuing legacy of disenfranchisement and voter suppression, or the fear generated by policing that targets and dehumanizes minorities.

“Focusing on such systemic injustice is not the recent result of ‘wokeness.’ It is unavoidable when a country’s treatment of some groups is dramatically at odds with its national ideals.

“So the accusation of systemic injustice is hardly new. But the reaction of civil rights leaders such as King was remarkable. Rather than judging America beyond hope, they loved it for what it might someday become: a multiracial society of equal justice and opportunity. Opposing racism was not only a method to confront injustice; it was also a way to help reclaim the personhood of Whites, who could finally lay down the burden of their bias.”

From “How to confront systemic racism? Heed the call of Martin Luther King,” by columnist Michael Gerson, *Washington Post*, April 22, 2021.:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/04/22/how-confront-systemic-racism-heed-call-martin-luther-king>

This column is prepared by the BYM Working Group on Racism (WGR) and sent to the designated liaison at each local Meeting. The BYM WGR meets most months on the first Saturday from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm, currently via Zoom. If you would like to attend, contact clerk David Etheridge, david.etheridge@verizon.net.

Editor's note: The following essay originally appeared on Alan Schmaljohn's blog entitled **SCHMALTALK**. It was admired by the editor of a newsletter distributed to English meetings in East Anglia and Woodbrooke, as well as Friends House in London. He sought and received permission from Alan to publish it. Because Alan's work had attracted such attention in the UK, he thought it might be suitable for these pages. An ad hoc committee agreed that it suits, so here it is:

What is Quaker? Faith, Practice, Community, and Egalitarian Governance

To be Quaker is to become convinced of the rightness *for oneself* [i] of a particular way of seeing, thinking, and understanding, and then to endeavor to live internally and relationally in harmony with those received truths. Collectively, these are called *Faith and Practice*. [ii] Underlying "*the way*" are theologies or philosophies that vary among individual Quakers and between branches, [iii] but they converge on a spiritual egalitarianism among all persons, and a direct (i.e. mystical) access to the source of all peace, love, and understanding, [iv] Who [v] may go by many names including God. Originally Christocentric and still almost conventionally so among the majority of Quakers worldwide, inward faith among "liberal" and other Quakers may be partially informed or grounded in panentheism, the God of Einstein and Spinoza (pantheism), Buddhist tenets, non-theism, rational agnosticism, stoicism, or elsewhere. Typically, there is little or no emphasis on sin or salvation as these are commonly understood. Fixed beliefs including creeds are anathema, as Truth is considered to be in a state of *continuing revelation*; consequently, invariant (or frozen-in-time) interpretations of holy texts or unconditional deference to persons of authority can rightly be viewed as unhelpful idolatry. Outward sacraments (including baptism) are considered harmless "notions" that are nonessential and not practiced at all among Liberal Friends. If this sounds anarchic, it is not. Coherence is guided by queries and advices, not dogma, guilt, or fear. A peculiar Quaker jargon (patois) is useful in emphasizing how Quaker understandings may differ from the commonplace, but can also make things seem either quaint or even more mysterious than they actually are. [vi]

Practice—the inward and outward way of living—is inseparable from Faith. Each informs and inspires the other, and each is strengthened in community. Named principles (testimonies) shared and celebrated by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) include integrity, simplicity, nonviolence, active peacemaking, equality, and stewardship. Silence and deep listening—listening for the "*still small voice*" [vii] of God and listening to one another—are highly valued; many communities meet primarily in silence, punctuated by unprogrammed vocal ministry. In such Meetings, there is no single priest or pastor, and no paid clergy, Friends having eliminated not the priesthood but the laity.

While the theology of Quakers is outside the mainstream, it is not altogether unique: most of its threads are found in other religions, many of them older than Quakerdom's origins in the 1660's. But from this theology Quakers derived a model of organization and self-governance that is an exceptional departure from the familiar domination schemes of hierarchy or voting. Quakers invest the time and care to labor toward a sense of the group—beyond consensus and typically finding unity—with individuals offering their views via plain speech and integrity, yet listening deeply and subordinating their egos to a greater wisdom. "Right action" is prioritized over speed and expediency. [viii]

In a given community, "Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business" (a.k.a. Business Meeting) is traditionally held monthly, and the community itself is known as a Monthly Meeting. Representatives from a dozen or so Monthly Meetings may gather Quarterly, and each of several multistate groupings of 50-100 Meetings gather annually in open sessions (for example Baltimore Yearly Meeting or Philadelphia Yearly Meeting) to sustain relationships and consider

shared issues and programs. Additional networks of national and international Quaker organizations tether Friends in activism, lobbying, and service. However, decisionmaking authority and assets (including properties) remain the purview of Monthly Meetings except where intentionally ceded.

Who then can identify as Quaker? Some Friends assert a necessity to hold membership in an established Monthly Meeting. [ix] Others feel just as strongly that identity is existential, a recognition and declaration of True Self in the context of Faith, Practice, and Community. Either way, newcomers are welcomed and embraced, as even the most established Quaker communities know new “seekers” to radiate the joy of finding their true home, and to provide the community with new talents and perspectives.[x]

Take note that, despite rhyming, Quakers and Shakers have very different origins and theologies: Quakers are neither celibate nor known as great furniture makers. Nevertheless, a favorite song among Quakers is the Shaker hymn, “Simple Gifts”.

Quakerism is simple. And complex. The essentials revolve around faith, practice, community, and egalitarian governance.

FOOTNOTES:

[i] Paradoxically, community is essential but cannot thrive unless each individual knows themselves to be in a best-fit situation for personal spiritual growth. Personal responsibility for one’s own faith and practice is at once liberating and challenging; it is not for everyone, not the “easiest” path, and this is reflected in Quakerism’s relatively static membership numbers. “Defined rules of belief” and a promised route to personal salvation are far more popular, and not offered by most Quaker communities. There does exist an evangelical branch of Quakers, but recruitment and “conversion” of others is not a historical priority for Quakers.

[ii] *Faith and Practice* is also the name given to a published set of guidelines and resources formulated by each Yearly Meeting (a territorial grouping of communities), revised every couple decades for purposes of harmonizing the agreed-upon commonalities between the participating communities. Most of these are available online.

[iii] see <http://www.quakerinfo.org/quakerism/branches/today>

[iv] “(What’s So Funny ‘Bout) Peace, Love, and Understanding” is a 1974 song written by English singer/songwriter Nick Lowe and subsequently covered by many. I like the Keb’ Mo’ version (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6Eie4poJ1U>)

[v] The rare E.E. Cummings devotee will recognize the personal pronoun “Who” as an intended reference to God, lifted from E.E. Cumming’s essays: “... mysteries alone are significant ... love is the mystery-of-mysteries who creates them all” in *i: six nonlectures*

[vi] Quakers speak of “the Light,” once took care to use “Thee” and “Thou” in speech, “affirm” rather than “swear” to be truthful, are “convinced” rather than “converted,” etc.

[vii] From *1 Kings 19:12*, also translated as “a delicate whispering voice”; this is how God spoke to Elija. Quakers find it an apt description of what may be discovered by deep listening. Are Quakers prone to auditory hallucinations? Rarely. How does the still small voice differ from imagination? In Scene 1 of George Bernard Shaw’s play *Saint Joan* (https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/s/shaw/george_bernard/saint-joan/complete.html), the following exchange occurs:

Joan. “I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God.”

Robert. “They come from your imagination.”

Joan. “Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us.”

[viii] In my view, the practices of corporate discernment are the most important legacy and example the Quakers have provided. The general concept of seeking unity is not unique, as it was embedded in many indigenous cultures and is arguably the way in which many families decide things as simple as where to go on vacation. But Quakers have provided a framework that succeeds in the modern era, so long as participants care more about the community and the rightness of discernment than they care about “winning.” I recoil and rebel in the secular world when some egoist declares “let’s call the question,” insisting that—right or wrong—a vote and majoritarian dominance on a divisive question is better than delay. The flaws of hierarchical decisionmaking are too many and too obvious to recount (see Trump).

[ix] Traditional importance of defined membership was rooted in expediencies that were more important in past centuries. For example, in the earliest years, self-proclaimed Friends could potentially overreach (in heresy or violence) and bring the King’s army (or other government) down on all, so a way was needed to disavow such persons as non-members. In the U.S., it was easier (as recently as the Vietnam conflict) to assert pacifist status (re the Selective Service draft) if one were a longtime member of a Quaker community, with paperwork to show it. For the “institution,” there remain several legalistic reasons to have a defined membership cohort, but they have little if anything to do with colloquial self-identification of one’s faith and practice.

[x] If anyone visits a Quaker meeting and finds it to be insular, inhospitable, and resistant to the possible change wrought by new members or attenders, such a meeting should be considered an outlier, and seekers should look for a healthier nearby meeting.

The Web Edition of the Newsletter does not include minutes from Gunpowder’s Meeting for Business. Personal Information has been redacted. The full newsletter, complete with minutes, is available at the Meetinghouse – attenders may also request the electronic or print edition.

Please feel free to inquire with Gunpowder’s Clerk at gunpowderclerk@gmail.com.