

From:

Deepening and Strengthening Our Meeting for Worship

57th Street Meeting of Friends, Chicago, 2006

www.57thstreetmeeting.org/sites/default/files/publications/MeetingforWorship.pdf

The Sense of the Meeting was strong that Friends wish and expect Meeting for Worship to be a place and time where Friends and visitors:

- 1) feel physically, emotionally and spiritually safe,
- 2) enjoy an atmosphere of benevolent tolerance, and above all
- 3) experience a Spirit-led communal worship and ministry.

In the discussion of Spirit-led ministry, Friends shared the belief, as testified to by generations of Friends, that there should be a community standard for ministry – that Meeting for Worship not become an open forum for those who wish for various personal reasons to speak. Members and attenders were encouraged to actively question their promptings to speak, to let messages “season,” and in general to make every effort to discern that their words issue from the Spirit rather than themselves alone.

The following guidelines were mentioned to help Friends question their own promptings and also to help the community identify those whose ministry may be inappropriate. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that these are guidelines, not rules, and that no guidelines can supersede the true promptings of the Spirit.

- 1) Question the use of “I” in your messages, especially if your message begins with “I.”
- 2) Messages may be inspired by previous messages but should not simply be responses to them – and messages that are contradictory responses to previous messages are cause for grave concern. In like vein, there should be an appropriate pause after ministry before new ministry begins.
- 3) Friends should avoid messages that are essentially political in nature and should question messages prompted by current events.
- 4) Messages should not be announcements and likewise generally should not concern Meeting business.
- 5) Friends should exercise caution in delivering ministry that is over-intellectual or sounds like a lecture.
- 6) Friends should question their urge to speak if it comes frequently and especially if it comes during all or almost all Meetings for Worship they attend.
- 7) In keeping with Meeting for Worship being a safe place, messages critical of or attacking someone outright are not appropriate.

Members and attenders were encouraged to use the above guidelines as a reference point during their internal discernment process, to pursue further reading on the matter if they are still in doubt and to feel free to ask for help from other members and attenders.

In maintaining the community standard, Friends felt that modeling appropriate ministry was of essential importance. The production of a card with the above guidelines on it was suggested.

In enforcing the standard of appropriate ministry, the time-honored practice of “standing down” inappropriate messages was discussed, as was courteous, loving, Friendly admonition prompted by a concern for the good of the community. If these are not effective, loving eldering by the Ministry and Counsel committee would be in order.

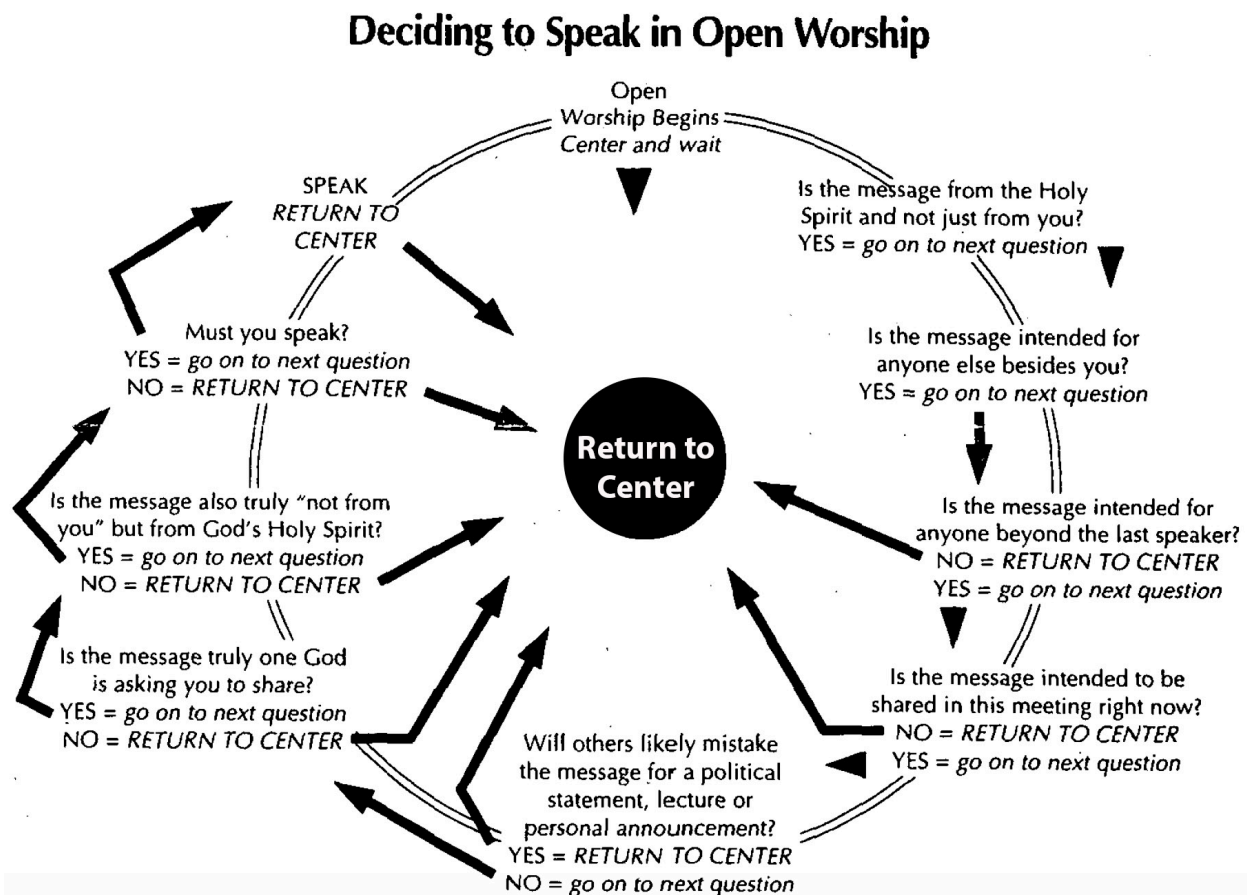
From:

Open Worship

Adapted from a pamphlet by Stan Thornburg

Quaker Life, July/August, 1997

www.voicesoffriends.org/pub/Thornburg1998.pdf



From:

Vocal Ministry: Advices

Baltimore Yearly Meeting, 2007

If you feel moved to speak, take a moment to test your leading. . . Remember that silence is not just the space between messages, but a deep and living communion with the “Spirit that gives life.” Your silent prayer and openness to God are themselves a form of ministry that enriches the Meeting community. Allow adequate time between spoken messages, so that all may listen to God, and truly hear the previous message.

Brevity is an under-appreciated virtue. If you speak, do not feel compelled to explore all the implications of your insight. Rather, leave room for the Spirit to work through the next person, building on your words and possibly extending them in an unexpected direction. . . .

Remember that our manner of worship is ultimately a mystery under the direction of the Spirit. Each Meeting for Worship is a spiritual adventure, unique and unpredictable. Let us remember in humility that “the end of words is to bring us to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter.” (Isaac Penington, 1670)

From:

The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship

George H. Gorman, 1956

The most valuable things said in meeting are those that honestly reflect real experiences and are expressed simply . . . [Despite] the difficulties caused by unhelpful ministry, I want at the start to stress how greatly meetings can be enriched by the enthusiasm of newcomers . . . They all bring with them fresh ways of looking at life.

Spoken contributions in a Quaker meeting need not be expressed in what is often thought of as devout or religious language . . . However, our contributions do need to reflect the expressions and ideas that are really true for us, because we have lived through them, pondered upon them, considered them most deeply and thus appropriated them for ourselves.

What we say should always have the innate capacity to transcend ordinary human experience although remaining part of it, but nevertheless pointing to an enlarged dimension and vision of life. . . Anyone who feels drawn to speak should accept the discipline of asking some questions of himself before he opens his mouth. . . [For example:] Is the experience or idea I am about to share with my fellow worshipers such that it will contribute to the sensitivity of the life of the meeting and help it to reach an awareness of transcendence? Will my contribution help forward the sense of awe, wonder, adoration, praise, and thanksgiving – an affirmation of the splendor and goodness of life and its ultimate purpose in love and truth? . . .

Anything that smacks of self-advertisement, axe-grinding, or is in the nature of useful information that we should like to let people know that we possess, should give rise in us to a strong hesitation as to its suitability, to put it mildly. . . It is also, sadly, true that Friends who have intellectual gifts can be a burden by speaking too readily, too frequently, and too lengthily . . .

From:

The Journal of George Fox

George Fox, 1656

All my dear friends in the noble seed of God, and who have known his power, life and presence amongst you, let it be your joy to hear or see the springs break forth in any, through which you have all unity in the same feeling, life and power.

From:

Gospel Truth Demonstrated

George Fox, 1657

The intent of all speaking is to bring into the life and to walk in, and to possess the same, and to live in and enjoy it, and to feel God's presence.

From:

The Light Within

Isaac Pennington, circa 1660

The Lord opened my spirit. The Lord gave me the certain and sensible feeling of the pure seed, which had been with me from the beginning. The Lord caused his power to fall upon me, . . . And so, in the willingness which God had wrought in me, in this day of his power to my soul, I gave up to be instructed, exercised and led by him, . . .

From:

A Tender Visitation

William Penn, 1771

When you come to your meetings . . . do you sit down in True Silence, resting from your own Will and Workings, and waiting upon the Lord, with your minds fixed in that Light wherewith Christ has enlightened you, until the Lord breathes life in you, refresheth you, and prepares you, and your spirits and souls, to make you fit for his service, that you may offer unto him a pure and spiritual sacrifice?

From:

A Testament of Devotion

Thomas Kelly, 1941

. . . words should not break the silence, but continue it. For the Divine Life who was ministering through the medium of silence is the same Life as is now ministering through words. And when such words are truly spoken "In the Life," then when such words cease, the *uninterrupted* silence and worship continue, for silence and words have been of one texture, one piece.