

Notes:

Quakers on Race and Otherness

Western Friend Connect – Workshop Meeting Room – 8/10/2017

Participants:

- Barbara Christwitz – Lake County Worship Group (Clearlake, CA)
- Carol Clinkenbeard – Mountain View Meeting (Denver, CO)
- Olivia Henry – San Francisco Meeting (San Francisco, CA)
- Timothy Jarvis – San Benito, TX
- Sandy Kewman – Grass Valley Meeting (Grass Valley, CA)
- Mary Klein – Palo Alto Meeting (Palo Alto, CA)
- Fred Koster – Albuquerque Meeting (Albuquerque, NM)
- Heather Levien – Berkeley Meeting (Berkeley, Ca)
- Joe Magruder – Berkeley Meeting (Berkeley, Ca)
- Philip Malcolm – Santa Fe Meeting (Santa Fe, NM)
- Kate McClellan – Palo Alto Meeting (Palo Alto, CA)
- Jorge Morales – San Jose Meeting (San Jose, CA)
- Jeff Richman – Live Oak (Salinas, CA)
- Kathy Richman – Live Oak (Salinas, CA)
- Amy Rowland – Mountain View Meeting (Denver, CO)
- Jean Harrison Seagler – Santa Cruz Meeting (Santa Cruz, CA)
- Leni Skarin – Agate Passage (Hansville, WA)
- Jan Turner – Humboldt Meeting (Humboldt, CA)
- Rob Roy Woodman – Davis Meeting (Davis, CA)
- Sue – Colorado Springs Meeting (Colorado Springs, CO)

The following notes incorporate ideas shared orally during the online conversation. Thanks to Charlene Weir for taking notes.

Introductions: Each participant's particular interest in this topic

- Our meeting is creating a group to support an effort to confront white privilege and issues of race in our meeting.
- Our meeting has been considering issues of white privilege through sessions sponsored by our Adult Education Committee.

- I have read the book *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship* and will be attending a workshop on this subject soon by Vanessa Julye. I want to participate in all opportunities I have to consider this subject.
- We have a lot of students who are non-white in our town and who don't feel safe. As a meeting, we are looking at what we can do to help.
- I wanted to support the people who are hosting this conversation. We live in an area that is 75% Latino and our Meeting has only one Latino family and one African-American. I want to know how we can become less insular. One thing we need to do is to translate all our outreach materials into Spanish.
- There area about thirty people in my meeting, and I am the only Latino.
- We have an ongoing concern in our yearly meeting and in our quarterly meetings about diversity. Our yearly meeting will be spending the upcoming year considering the issue of white privilege.
- I have seen that even when Friends mean well, we still don't "get it." We still say things that people of color would likely find offensive – micro-aggressions.
- This is a concern I have worked on for years.
- I have a longstanding interest in this topic. When I lived back East, I attended a meeting that was essentially all-white in a place that was much more diverse. The meeting I attend now is also overwhelmingly white, although our Hispanic representativeness has been growing.
- I want to learn more about the basics of racism and how it manifests itself. We are generally an all-white meeting, despite our belief in equality.

Introduction to a self-reflective experience about race and otherness:

Rob Roy Woodman: My meeting is working to become aware of differences, to be accepting. We see ourselves as generally all-around good people, but sometimes we see where we come up short, where have an opportunity to learn. We recently became galvanized by work on accepting trans people, but we could still see little bits of homophobia coming up when we had those discussions.

I am always trying to increase my cultural sensitivity, my awareness. Davis is a University town, with a lot of diversity, so we often feel like "nothing bad could happen here." But a gay man was attacked in Davis in 2013 and suffered brain damage. His mother started an organization called *The Davis Phoenix Coalition* in response. Shortly after September 11, 2001, a new interfaith organization was formed, called *Celebration of Abraham*. This organization was able to resolve some community conflicts created when an Imam who was new to Davis gave some hate-filled sermons in Arabic, which were later translated into English. The organization was able to demonstrate the strength of interfaith ties in Davis. Even so, we are continually needing to learn from mistakes that are made due to cultural prejudices – sometimes tragic mistakes.

I am about to show you a series of photographs that I have chosen because most viewers will see them as they will be provocative. They might provoke feelings of disgust or fear; they might even provoke sensory experiences, as in “that person stinks.” I want you to watch your reactions to these images. You will have reactions. You might consider whether you would you give a particular person a hug – are they attractive or repulsive to you? Someone that you see as repulsive might be someone I see as attractive.

We need to learn to appreciate differences. We need to understand different world views without needing to say that my experience is valid and yours is not, but instead to say my experience and your experience are both valid. We can't really do this unless we also learn to see what our own brains are doing in terms of judging other people as acceptable or unacceptable.

Friends viewed a series of images depicting people from many walks of life.

In the first portion of the ensuing conversation, Friends shared their personal reactions to the images they had just viewed. Different Friends saw different things in the images. This portion of the conversation was not recorded.

In a second portion of the conversation, which was video-recorded, Friends discussed questions of race and otherness in more general terms:

- I want to start by acknowledging that I *am* white and privileged. I don't intend to feel guilty about that because I think guilt sets up barriers. It isn't helpful for anyone to make assumptions about how I see others or about how others see me because I am white and privileged. Guilt, pity, and outrage set us apart. I am trying to become more aware of the way I was raised.
- Trying to be aware helps us remember to take the next step, which isn't to ask “What do they need?” I've found I'm too ready to rush in with good ideas and helpful solutions. I've found it's better for me to ask first, “What do they think?” Wanting to be the good person really gets in the way of “being with” someone. If I can remember this, when I ask different questions, I am often surprised.
- Much of my reaction to “other” is fear. I have felt that in response to a group of gay men who were hanging out and I didn't fit in and I didn't know what to say. I also know that I particularly have a problem when the “others” are angry. I don't know how to respond to anger. In my job, I have been the white minority in situations, like on an Indian reservation, and I was often the target of people's anger. I had to learn how to not take it personally, to accept it as making sense.
- I try to not take offense. Or, at least, I try to *avoid* the defensive argument. I just need to say, “I hear you.”
- I have worked hard to get past the fear and the defensiveness. It's hard for me to not be afraid of making mistakes. And you cannot do this work of undoing racism if you are afraid of making mistakes. I know that when I am feeling scared, I am not able to learn. I need to be curious to learn. Scared and curious do not go well together.

- Paying attention to my reactions to the images we just saw – this has surprised me. I found myself repulsed by disfigurement, by lack of teeth. I was not aware that I held those feelings.
- To answer the question “Who would I hug?” in these images – I think I would hug people with a smile. I would not approach people who seem angry and not happy. I grew up in border areas, places where people are in groups or clan, and we see those differences there.
- We put meaning into our differences from culture or race and that might be different from our responses to unhealthiness. Our reaction to unhealthiness might have a deep biological basis.
- When I am afraid, I seek others like myself. Thinking about this experience, and other experiences that I have been having lately, I am feeling a strong push to focus only on the person I have a conflict with. Not to seek out other people to talk with about my problem. I am seeing that I need to go to the person I’m having the conflict with and express my willingness to listen. To say when I have been hurt. To hear how I have hurt them.
- When we stop ourselves and say, “Let’s get curious” – it is in that moment when we stop that the Light comes in.