Religious Education and Study
[[NOTES: draft ready for YM review 1/30/2008. (Was circulated in the same form at AS 2007; this version adds the Jones quotation from 1993 F&P p. 17, Cadbury from p. 22. [Sources & changes from 1993 F&P: Reworking of “Religious Education” on p. 45, quotations from “Scriptures” pp. 21-22; other quotations and additional advices added.]]

As Friends, we study and learn throughout our lives in order to understand and deepen our experience of God, our Inner Teacher.

Example is a strong teacher, especially for children, so our primary way of imparting our Quaker testimony and conduct is by living and acting faithfully in our homes, communities and Meetings. As we are led, and our lives are transformed by God, our conduct becomes right-ordered, our worship deepens, our discernment comes more readily, and our lives reflect the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Because our Quaker faith grows from this inward transforming experience, it is imperative that we share Friends’ history, practices, testimonies, and process through religious education for all ages.

The efforts of Friends engaged in teaching can be augmented by the strong curricula that are available for both children’s First Day School and Adult Education such as “Quakerism 101”. Central and Junior Friends programs at Quarterly Meetings and Annual Sessions which feature hands-on learning in Quaker practice are a valuable supplement to monthly meeting resources.

Bible and other study groups; sharing personal spiritual journeys; reading the journals of exemplary Friends and other spiritual literature; engaging in service projects; worship-sharing; attending retreats, workshops, or opportunities offered by Quarterly and Yearly Meetings and conferences sponsored by other Friends’ organizations—all help us continue this life-long learning. As we learn together, we spiritually nurture each other according to our gifts and leadings, participate more fully in our Meetings, and deepen our understanding of the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends.

Quotations

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

*Galatians 5:23*

*Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them. Then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.*

*George Fox, 1656*

*I was not “christened” in a church, but I was sprinkled from morning to night with the dew of religion. We never ate a meal together which did not begin with a hush of thanksgiving; we never began a day without “a family gathering”*
at which my mother read a chapter of the Bible, after which there would follow a
weighty silence…. My first steps in religion were thus acted. It was a religion we
did together. Almost nothing was said in the way of instructing me. We all joined
together to listen for God, and then one of us talked to him for the others. In
these simple ways my religious disposition was being unconsciously formed and
the roots of my faith in unseen realities were reaching down far below my crude
and childish surface thinking.

Rufus M. Jones, 1926

How much the Bible has to teach when taken as a whole, that cannot be done
by snippets! There is its range over more than a thousand years giving us the
perspective of religion in time, growing and changing, and leading from grace to
grace. There is its clear evidence of the variety of religious experience, not the
kind of strait jacket that nearly every church, even Friends, have sometimes been
tempted to substitute for the diversity in the Bible. To select from it but a single
strand is to miss something of its richness. Even the uncongenial and the alien to
us is happily abundant in the Bible. The needs of men today are partly to be
measured by their difficulty in understanding that with which they differ. At this
point the Bible has no little service to render. It requires patient insight into the
unfamiliar and provides a discipline for the imagination such as today merely on
the political level is a crying need of our time.

Further the Bible is a training school in discrimination among alternatives.
One of the most sobering facts is that it is not on the whole a peaceful book--I
mean a book of peace of mind. The Bible is the deposit of a long series of
controversies between rival views of religion. The sobering thing is that in nearly
every case the people shown by the Bible to be wrong had every reason to think
they were in the right, and like us they did so. Complacent orthodoxy is the
recurrent villain in the story from first to last and the hero is the challenger, like
Job, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul.

Henry Joel Cadbury, 1953

Take time to learn about other people's experiences of the Light. Remember
the importance of the Bible, the writings of Friends and all writings which reveal
the ways of God. As you learn from others, can you in turn give freely from what
you have gained? While respecting the experiences and opinions of others, do
not be afraid to say what you have found and what you value. Appreciate that
doubt and questioning can also lead to spiritual growth and to a greater
awareness of the Light that is in us all.

Advice # 5 from Britain Yearly Meeting

Specifically, through a realization of the living presence of God, religious
education should enlarge and enrich our lives in such areas of experience as
worship, the world of nature, the Bible, the life and teachings of Jesus, the
history and testimonies of Quakers, the examples of other great religious leaders,
the work and play of the meeting, and sharing with other peoples.

New York Yearly Meeting

Advises

Monthly meetings have a special responsibility to bring children and adults under
their care into full participation in the life of the Meeting and into an understanding of the
beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends.

As individuals and families we must show our children and each other that our search for Truth involves every aspect of life; our religious education programs should do the same for members and attenders of all ages. Such programs can include special study groups, worship sharing opportunities, service projects, and Meeting libraries, but the cornerstone of religious education for most Meetings is a thriving First Day School program for children and youth. These efforts will succeed only if members actively support them by full participation, rather than leaving parents to cope alone with the religious education of their children.

Our lives speak eloquently. Friends of all ages are encouraged to share our personal spiritual histories with one another, as well as to study the lives of Friends who have gone before through their journals and biographies.

Quarterly Meetings and the Yearly Meeting have a responsibility to assist and support Friends in religious educational programming. Other Friends’ groups can also be looked to for resources.

We encourage Friends to follow their leadings in seeking education of all kinds, and requesting financial aid when appropriate to do so. Meetings should be sensitive in offering the financial assistance when needed.

**Queries**

*In what ways does our Meeting help to develop the spiritual lives of all of our members, attenders and children?*

*What efforts am I making to educate myself and members and attenders of all ages in the knowledge of our religious heritage, and the history of Friends?*

*Do we prepare our members and children for worship and for a way of life consistent with the principles of the Religious Society of Friends? How do we teach about Quaker practices in business and worship and their importance to the Good Order of our Meeting community?*

*In what ways do we support each other in order to seek God's will and act upon our understanding of truth? Is there opportunity in our Meeting to share the excitement of religious discovery and the possibility of religious transformation?*

*Do I share my own faith and spiritual journey, as well as listen to and learn from others? Do we encourage such sharing within our families and Meeting communities?*