Quaker Mysteries Revealed: Quaker Faith and Practice
By Faith Marsalli

What are some of the characteristics of Friends that have spanned our 350+ years of history? What are the ways we as Friends are to live out our faith in this time and place in our history?

Mystical and Prophetic
Our faith is personal, and we experience God directly without an intermediary. We affirm that a basic holiness permeates all of life. We have a prophetic role in speaking truth to power by advocating for peace and for justice for the marginalized in society.

Non-creedal
We don’t have a checklist of beliefs, even though some Friends feel more secure with a list. Throughout our history Friends have affirmed the Bible as authoritative in one's life as it speaks of God’s relationship with humankind and gives us principals to live by. Friends also affirm that God continues to reveal God’s Self by speaking to us inwardly and through the shared life within the meeting. I like to think of these as a three-legged stool: The Bible, our inward attention to the Still Small Voice, and the spiritual community. The stool will fall over without the balance of these three legs.

Our History
We can't reproduce history or the spiritual highs of early Friends but we can learn from the willingness to respond to the fresh wind of the Spirit. We can try to speak to the culture we live in as George Fox and our early Quaker mothers and fathers did. Let’s ask ourselves in 2020—What is essential within our Quaker heritage and what might be left behind?

The Core of Quakerism
The Meeting for Worship is central to our life as Friends. The Spirit of Christ is in our midst to teach us and guide us individually and corporately. Worship happens most powerfully when worship in solitude and worship in community are combined. Knowledge about God can never replace intimate acquaintance with God.

“There is a divine Abyss within us all, a holy Infinite Center, a Heart, a Life who speaks in us and through us to the world. We have all heard this holy Whisper at times. At times we have followed the Whisper, and amazing equilibrium of life, amazing effectiveness of living set in.” – Thomas Kelly

Friends believe that the same Spirit who gathers us in worship also leads us in the decision-making process. This is why Quaker business is conducted as a discerning process rather than the rule of majority. Friends seek to be led by the Present Christ, and they wait until the meeting is gathered with a oneness of mind before making a decision. This process may take longer, but decisions made in unity are much stronger than majority rule, or even consensus.

Friends Sacraments
A common misconception among newcomers to Quakerism is the idea that Friends don’t believe in sacraments. Friends do believe in the sacramental work of the Present Christ so strongly that they refuse to reduce it to an outward symbol, form, or ceremony. For early Friends, they wanted their focus to be on an inward spiritual reality rather than engaging in countless rituals that had lost meaning.

Communion is practiced each Sunday when we gather in silence listing to Christ. “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20) So in every gathering Christ is present, and every meal that we share is potentially a sacramental experience.

Baptism depicts the spiritual change that happens within the life of one who abides in Christ and in whom Christ abides. The water only points to a deeper spiritual reality. John the Baptist said, “I baptize you with water. . . But after me will come one who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” (Like 3:13) The word “baptize” means to immerse, to saturate, to take on the characteristics of the substance in which something is immersed. So spiritual baptism is more of an abiding immersion. It is an ongoing spiritual event that purifies and transforms the individual into the image of Christ.

Friends Testimonies
Lloyd Lee Wilson writes, “Quakers have been notable over the centuries for a set of behaviors they have called testimonies. Of these, the most notorious has been our refusal to participate in war, or the preparation for war, which is usually called the peace testimony. In recent years Friends have treated these testimonies as valuable in and of themselves, but to our spiritual forbearers this was not the case; they were naturally occurring signs that a more important fundamental change had taken place within the individual.

Today we often put the cart before the horse and speak of the testimonies as being the heart of Quakerism. Outward change or societal changes are not sufficient to change human beings. God’s grace and love acting in our hearts is the necessary first motion, which makes all other change possible.”

Quaker Spices have been a way we have tried to articulate the work of God in our lives and are an ongoing organic expression of our faith. Are there other characteristics God might be forming in us?

Simplicity, Peacemaking, Integrity, Community, Equality, Stewardship

There is certainly an overlapping effect of all these spices.

The Fruit of the Spirit might be another way to express how God is at work in our lives.

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control
These are all manifestations of an inward reality—a life lived in the Spirit.

**Queries**
Friends have used queries as a way to reflect on various issues within one’s life. They have often been used in the meeting for worship or whenever Friends gather. Ideally, they should be open-ended questions requiring more than a yes or no answer and cause one to reflect deeply over time, individually and as a worshipping community. Each Faith and Practice contains a list of Queries.

**Common Quaker Phrases**
- Gospel Order
- Let your life speak.
- Walk gently on the earth.
- Answering that of God in everyone
- Are all hearts clear?
- Speak to thy condition
- Seekers of Truth
- Inner Light
- Mind the Light
- Gathered Meeting
- As way opens
- Unprogrammed Meeting
- Programmed Meeting
- Meeting for Worship
- Meeting for Worship and Business
- Meetinghouse
- Meeting room