

Friday with Friends

A Newsletter of Klamath Falls Friends Meeting
1918 Oregon Ave.
Klamath Falls, OR 97601

**The Church's Monthly Meeting for Business is
May 19th directly after meeting for worship**

Questions for the Book Group, June 2, 2024

Living Buddha, Living Christ

Discussion Questions for Chapters 5-6

- 1. How are monasteries and convents different than churches in the outside world? What can we learn from them?
- 2. Buddhists cite three refuges Buddha, dharma, and sangha. What would it mean for us as Christians take refuge in Christ, the Christian way, and our local church?
- 3. In what way can you transform yourself to improve your local church?
- 4. How can you make Jesus' presence real in our world today?
- 5. How can we heal the collective consciousness (pg 75-76)?
- 6. How can we pray for others whose needs are different from our own?
- 7. What can we do to heal the situation so everyone can get what they need?
- 8. How do you take action in the world without anger?
- 9. In what ways can you increase your love for your enemies? Who are your enemies?
- 10. How do you move beyond righteous anger against those who have wronged you?



Please consider attending the Annual Sessions for the Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting. This will give you time to get to know other Quakers, to worship with and to fellowship with many others, to have important input into such things as yearly meeting decisions and to be of support to others. It is very important for more than just the pastors to go to the annual sessions. If you can only participate through Zoom, please consider participating. Your pastors will be attending. You may carpool if you'd like.

The Sierra-Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends (SCYMF) Annual Sessions for 2024 will be held at Canby Grove Christian Center near Canby, Oregon, from Friday, June 7th at 9 AM through Sunday, June 9th at 5 PM. We will also offer Zoom access to many sessions for those who are unable to join us in person.

Programs for children and youth are being planned, along with a full schedule of workshops, small groups, music, worship, business, and time for fellowship with old and new Friends.

Please share this with those in your church who might be interested.

COVID SAFETY:

Facemasks are voluntary, but welcome. If you feel sick, please do not attend in person. We will provide the Zoom information to everyone who registers to attend in person, in case of a last-minute need to stay home.

Accommodation Options

Riverfront Lodge – Most sleeping rooms in the Lodge are designed for 1-4 guests, with a queen bed, bunk bed, linens and towels, and private bath. There are two handicapped-accessible rooms with a queen bed only, and a few larger rooms which accommodate 3-6 guests with a queen and two sets of bunk beds. ***If you have difficulty navigating stairs, and/or need ground level accommodations, please inform the registrar.*** There is no elevator.

Woodland Cabins – Small cabins, each with a queen bed and set of bunk beds, hold up to 4 guests each. Larger cabins hold up to six guests with a queen bed and two sets of bunks. Guests bring their own towels and bed linens or sleeping bags. *There are no restrooms in the cabins; restroom and shower facilities are near the cabin area.*

We will have options for one- or two-night stays, and on-campus meals during the weekend, starting with lunch on Friday through lunch on Sunday. You may also opt to attend in person but stay off-campus and come for a day or two or all three.

Pre-registration is required

Lodging assignments will be made in the order received (with consideration of special needs when possible), so please do not delay! Please pay with a check or Tithe.ly when you register.

Please let the registrar know if lack of funds would prevent you from attending. We don't want the cost to get in the way of anyone attending, so if you cannot pay the full registration amount, we will help cover your costs.

Please register and pay by May 20, 2024. Send a check made out to SCYMF with "annual sessions" in the memo line to the registrar, Rachel Hampton, at 7200 SE Woodstock Blvd. Apt 28, Portland, OR 97206 or pay by Tithe.ly on the SCYMF website. ***(Please do not publish the registrar's address online.)***

FEES:

The basic cost structure is as follows:

Adult (age 13+) in Lodge, 2 nights/7 meals = \$295

Child (age 3-12) in Lodge, 2 nights/7 meals = \$195

Adult (age 13+) in cabin, 2 nights/7 meals = \$205

Child (age 3-12) in cabin, 2 nights/7 meals = \$145

Babies (age 0-2) all housing = \$25

Costs go down if eating fewer meals or staying only one night or staying off-site.

Day use costs:

Adult (age 13+) \$40 plus \$20 per meal

Child (age 3-12) \$25 plus \$15 per meal

REGISTRATION:

You must register to attend on Zoom or in-person, even if only for day use without staying overnight. Zoom registration is \$25.

To register for in-person attendance, click here <https://forms.gle/Fen6MQqBAeg1fok88>

To register to attend via Zoom, click here <https://forms.gle/rRcYuUFwkGxEizqk9>

CANCELATION:

If you register for in-person attendance and need to change your registration, please contact Registrar@scymf.org.

Need to Know

- ***No pets permitted on the premises. Service animals must be caped and a guest service representative must be notified before the animal is on site.***
- ***No alcohol, marijuana, or illegal drugs.***
- ***No smoking except in designated areas.***
- ***No firearms, ammunition, explosives, or fireworks on site***

Children and Youth

Childcare and children's programs will be available throughout the conference for ages birth to 10 years. Childcare providers are Karen Wissig and Mary Bushey (both from

Eugene Friends Church). Youth activities will also be available, supervised by Julie Peyton (West Hills) and Friends.

All children and youth under 18 years of age must be supervised by adults at all times. This is especially critical when using recreational areas.

Recreation

Recreation opportunities include tennis, pickle-ball, basketball, hiking, horseshoes, volleyball, swimming, music, and board games.

Workshops for Annual Sessions

(The full descriptions of workshops can be found at <https://www.scymfriends.org/workshops>.)

Power of Enough with Jackie Stillwell of Right Sharing of World Resources
This workshop will be in-person only and will be held on Friday, June 7th from 4:00-5:30 PM.

Election Violence Prevention with Emily Provance
This workshop will be in-person only and will be held on Friday, June 7th at 4:00-5:30 PM.

The Dance Within and Between Us... With Faith Marsalli and Leann Williams
This workshop will be in-person only—and will be held on Saturday, June 8th at 4:00-5:30 PM.

Trans 201: Beyond the Basics with Nat
This workshop is in person only and will be held on Friday, June 7th at 4:00-5:30 PM

Praying with SoulCollage® with Ruba Byrd
This workshop is in person only and will be held on Saturday, June 8th at 4:00-5:30 PM.

Ways for Friends to Engage with AFSC's work for Peace and Justice with Brian Blackmore of AFSC
This workshop will be both in-person and on Zoom and will be held on Saturday, June 8th at 4:00-5:30 PM.

Canby Grove Christian Center is located at 7501 S Knights Bridge Rd, Canby, OR 97013.

Any questions? Contact Rachel Hampton at registrar@scymf.org or Meg Rice at gathering@scymf.org.

Quakers and Mysticism

<https://jollyquaker.com/2023/08/08/quakers-and-universal-mystical-experience/>



Quakers and Universal Mystical Experience

Posted on August 8, 2023 by Mark Russ

One thing Quakers are certain about is that they don't have creeds, formal statements of faith that everyone needs to affirm. Doctrine or dogma are things Quakers reject. Despite this rejection, there are some beliefs which are widely held and assumed to be normative amongst Quakers. Although Quakers are non-creedal, they do have an informal orthodoxy. One of these widely held beliefs is that the religious traditions of the world are united by a mystical core. Beneath the surface level differences of the world religions is a uniting spiritual bedrock. Quakerism, in its rejection of outward religious symbols and its use of stillness and silence, is seen as an essentially mystical religion that tries to get as close to this bedrock as possible. Quakerism is often seen as akin to other traditions labelled as mystical, such as Vedanta Hinduism, Sufism, Kabbalah and Buddhist meditation. Quakerism's focus on this mystical essence is thought to make the Quaker meeting a theologically inclusive space, holding different surface beliefs whilst

worshippers are mystically united. In this blog post I'm going to trace the history of this idea and suggest its built on problematic foundations.

A history of the universal mystical experience

The way mysticism is understood by Quakers today didn't emerge until the late 18th-century. Before this, the term "mystical theology" was used to describe particular habits of prayer and ways of interpreting the Bible within Christianity. The first people to be described as "mystics" were the 17th-century Quietists, a contemplative Christian movement in Spain, France and Italy. These "mystics" were seen as a fanatical sect within the Church, and "mystic" was often a pejorative term. By the mid-19th-century, this had changed significantly. In 1858, the eighth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* replaced "mystics" with "mysticism," describing it, not as a Christian sect, but as a kind of religious experience expressed across religious traditions whilst retaining a recognisable, unchanging core "whether they find expression in the Bagvat-Gita of the Hindu, or in the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg".^[1] A major factor behind this shift in definition was the European "discovery" of Hinduism and Buddhism, with translations of Indian sacred texts being produced in Europe from the late 18th-century onwards. This encounter with religious difference beyond Islam and Judaism challenged notions of Christian superiority, and so the concept of mysticism was used to make sense of religious difference. During the 19th-century, the writings of New England Transcendentalists and Unitarians like Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) promoted the idea of mysticism as a universal spirituality that transcended any one specific tradition.

Early Liberal Quakers and mysticism

The late 19th-century saw a revival of interest in Christian mysticism in England. This revival made its first notable appearance in Quakerism in Caroline Stephen's (1834-1909) popular book *Quaker Strongholds* (1891). Stephen saw the early Quakers as mystics, placing them alongside both the Quietists and those who were beginning to be included in the mystic fold, such as Thomas à Kempis and Theresa of Avila. For Stephen, Quakerism was a way to the mystical life, a mysticism that "may be found in all religions."^[2] This prepared the ground for Rufus Jones (1863-1948), the architect of Liberal Quakerism on both sides of the Atlantic with an untiring enthusiasm for mysticism. Whilst a student at Haverford College, Jones encountered the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, which had a huge influence on his thinking. On visiting Emerson's library, Jones discovered Emerson shared his

love of the German Lutheran Jakob Boehme (1575-1624), and it was through immersing himself in Emerson's essays and poetry that Jones came to his understanding of mysticism. With the assistance of Emerson, Jones discovered a mystical tradition which Quakerism was a part of. He saw Boehme as a forerunner of the Quaker faith, and Quakerism as the communal fruiting of the perennial mystical tradition with George Fox as its prophet.

William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902)

Alongside Emerson, another crucial influence on Rufus Jones' understanding of mysticism was the American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1910), particularly his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). For James, mysticism is at the root of individual religious experience and is present within various religious paths. He names four characteristics of mysticism: mystical experiences 1) cannot be expressed in words; 2) are states of deep knowing, of feeling more than thought; 3) are short lived; and 4) are passively experienced.^[3] Rufus Jones came to count James as a personal friend and had a picture of James hanging on his Haverford office wall. James' *Varieties* influenced not only Jones but liberal Quakers in general. This may be in part to James' glowing references to Quakerism as "something which it is impossible to overpraise... So far as our Christian sects to-day are evolving into liberality, they are simply reverting in essence to the position which Fox and the early Quakers so long ago assumed."^[4]

Rufus Jones work on mysticism was part of wider revival of interest in Christian mysticism in England, including the works of William Ralph Inge (1860-1954) and Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), whose *Mysticism* (1911) was extremely popular. Inge and Jones met and corresponded. Inge describes Quakers as "the mystical sect *par excellence*,"^[5] and Quakerism as "now coming into its own as perhaps the purest form of Christianity."^[6] Jones and other members of the mysticism revival promoted an active "affirmation mysticism" that was world-affirming, communal and practical.^[7] The ecstatic vision of union was not the end of the mystical path, but the beginning of active mission in the world.

Culture and religion

The modern understanding of mysticism rests on a clear distinction between the essential mystical experience accessible to all people, and the religious culture through which this experience is expressed and understood. Grace Jantzen has

argued that this distinction between universal experience and particular expression can be traced back to German Idealist and Romantic philosophy and the work of German theologian F.D.E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834). On this view, outward religious difference belies an underlying, essential experience.^[8] This distinction isn't particularly clear in Rufus Jones' writing on mysticism. Although he believed in an essential mystical experience, he also wanted to present Jesus as the most developed spiritual personality, and therefore Christianity as the most true religion. As liberal Quakers have moved in a Universalist direction through the 20th-century, this distinction becomes clearer. In his 1924 Swarthmore Lecture, Gerald Kenway Hibbert wrote that "every religious system has its 'Quakers' - those who turn from the outward and the legal and the institutional, and focus their attention on the Divine that is within."^[9] Howard H. Brinton wrote in 1957 that "silent worship has a powerful uniting influence in the deep unconscious regions of the soul... The feeling for that unity which exists in the depths when there is multiplicity at the surface is an experience shared by mystics of all religions."^[10] John Linton, in his 1977 lecture that sparked the beginnings of the Quaker Universalist Group, quotes Katharine Wilson: "Would it be true to say that Quakerism is not so much one specific sect of Christianity, or one specific religion, as the core that makes the centre of every religion?... It may be that Friends did not discover anything new at all but only what is at the heart of all religions if free from their cultural trappings."^[11] From my experience of Liberal Quakerism over the last two decades, this understanding of an universal mystical experience that transcends culture is pervasive, to the point of being a cornerstone of liberal Quaker theology.

The problems with universal mystical experience

As ubiquitous as this belief is among Liberal Quakers, there are substantial problems with this understanding of mysticism that I hope Friends can wrestle with.

Firstly, it isn't possible to make a distinction between culture and experience. There is a history of thinking of culture as clothing we put on, of distinct and discrete cultures with firm boundaries between them, of culture that exists outside of us. However, this understanding of culture has been thoroughly picked apart and found inadequate. As long as I exist as a body in time and space, I can't separate myself from culture. Culture is the sea we swim in, not something we can step outside of. Culture shapes our experience as much as experience shapes our culture. This means there is no essential mystical experience that transcends

culture. Instead of being outside of culture, the idea of universal mystical experience is itself a cultural construction, an idea emerging in a particular time and place. The theory of a universal mystical experience is born from German Idealism and American Unitarianism in the context of Europe's encounter with the religions of India. There is nothing universal about it.

Secondly, the idea of a universal mystical experience distorts our understanding of those we think of as "mystics." There are few mystics who conform to William James' description of mysticism. The idea that mystical experience can't be communicated in words doesn't match the experience of the medieval mystics like Julian of Norwich, who wrote voluminously about their experiences. The idea that mystical experience is more about feeling than the intellect would be absurd to Gregory of Nyssa and other mystics of the patristic period. When William James developed his theory of mysticism he didn't always consult original sources, instead drawing on a collection of quotes compiled by a former student. His understanding of mysticism prevented him from taking the "mystics" on their own terms. Similarly, Rufus Jones only used extracts from Boehme's writings that fit with his Jamesian definition of mysticism, and ignored what didn't fit, such as Boehme's esotericism. As Michael Birkel puts it, Jones "Quakerized Boehme... liberalized him... [and] Jonesified him, just as he Boehmefied George Fox."^[12] I see the same process at work in Jan Arriens words that "it is true that George Fox and the others had a good deal to say about Christ as Saviour and about the propitiation of sin, atonement and redemption, but I think this needs to be seen in the context of the time, when such thinking was deeply ingrained."^[13] The idea of universal mystical experience acts as a razor, cutting away anything too particular, like the specifics of Fox's Christianity.

Thirdly, believing in a universal mystical experience deceptively works against us being a truly inclusive community. It may help us to feel inclusive, but I worry that it also feeds a sense of Quaker spiritual superiority. If Quakers have found, as Katharine Wilson said, what is at "the heart of all religions if free from their cultural trappings," then this leads us to see "cultural trappings" as at best unnecessary, and at worst beneath us. Rufus Jones wrote disparagingly about the sacramental practices of other churches as "midway helps" that Quakers have moved beyond,^[14] and on a trip to India in 1926 wrote in his diary that in India "religion is still in the doll stage."^[15] Harold Dowell has written that people who are not Universalists, who rely on things like the Bible, "are very reluctant to do away with their crutches."^[16] How can we enter humbly into interreligious dialogue when we already think we have access to the core of the other's religion? There is much

more to say about this final criticism, especially in how the idea of the universal mystical experience relates to colonialism and Whiteness, emerging as it did from Europe's colonial encounter with, and construction of, the "mystic East." I'll be addressing these connections in a future blog post.

Mysticism is clearly an important part of Liberal Quakerism today and shouldn't be abandoned. Quaker mysticism is its own thing, a particular kind of mysticism growing in a particular context, and it has great value. Rufus Jones' "affirmation mysticism" was an important and life-giving development in Quaker spirituality and should be celebrated. But the Liberal Quaker belief in a universal mystical experience doesn't serve us well. It's a belief built on unstable foundations, presuming a universal knowledge we can't possibly possess. Another way must be found to account for theological and religious difference, a way that begins with a humble encounter with difference rather than an assumption of similarity.

Further reading

- Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995)
- L. E. Schmidt, 'The Making of Modern "Mysticism"', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 2 (1 June 2003): 273–302.
- Micael Birkel, *Quakers Reading Mystics* (Brill, 2018)
- Stephen A. Kent, 'Psychological and Mystical Interpretations of Early Quakerism: William James and Rufus Jones'. *Religion* 17, no. 3 (1987): 251–74.

Featured image photo by [Jr Korpa](#) on [Unsplash](#)

[1] L. E. Schmidt, 'The Making of Modern "Mysticism"', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 2 (1 June 2003): 282.

[2] Caroline Emelia Stephen, *Quaker Strongholds*, Third edition (London: E. Hicks, 1891), 35.

[3] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, ed. Matthew Bradley, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 290–91.

[4] James, 15.

[5] William Ralph Inge, *Mysticism in Religion* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1947), 17.

[6] Inge, 127.

[7] Michael Birkel, *Quakers Reading Mystics*, Brill Research Perspectives. Quaker Studies (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018), 65–66.

[8] Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion 8 (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 313.

[9] Gerald Kenway Hibbert, *The Inner Light and Modern Thought* (London: The Swarthmore Press Ltd., 1924), 24–25.

[10] Howard H. Brinton, *Quakerism and Other Religions* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1957), 7–8.

[11] John Linton, 'Quakerism as Forerunner', in *The Quaker Universalist Reader, Number 1: A Collection of Essays, Addresses and Lectures* (West Chester, PA: Quaker Universalist Fellowship, 1986), 12.

[12] Birkel, *Quakers Reading Mystics*, 73. A similar criticism can be found in Daniel E Bassuk, 'Rufus Jones and Mysticism', *Quaker Religious Thought* 46 (1978): 21.

[13] Jan Arriens, *The Place of Jesus in Quaker Universalism*, Quaker Universalist Group Pamphlets 17 (Glen Parva, Leicester: The Quaker Universalist Group, 1990), 5.

[14] Rufus Matthew Jones, *The Faith and Practice of the Quakers* (Richmond, Ind: Friends United Press, 1980), 65.

[15] Matthew S. Hedstron, 'Rufus Jones and Mysticism for the Masses', *Cross Currents* 54, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 42.

[16] Harold Dowell, *Christianity in an Evolutionary Perspective*, Quaker Universalist Group Pamphlets 18 (Glen Parva, Leicester: The Quaker Universalist Group, 1990), 20–21.

<https://www.renofriends.org/are-quakers-mystics/>

Are Quakers Mystics?

- Post authorBy [renofriends](#)
- Post date[October 30, 2020](#)

Last month, Reno Friend Doug Smith led a spiritual discussion about Mysticism on Zoom. It was well attended and stimulated a vibrant discussion. One of Doug's questions was: Do you think Quakerism can be a form of mysticism? Some thought yes and others no. Defining mystics and mysticism is a tricky task, as mystical experiences are often difficult to explain. Here is the Oxford Languages definition of a mystic: *a person who seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain unity with or absorption into the Deity or the Absolute, or who believes in the spiritual apprehension of truths that are beyond the intellect.*

Isn't this what we Quakers do when we sit in silence during Worship and wait for a message beyond us to come through to the Meeting? Our spiritual practice itself is mystical. I personally experience an inner quaking when I am given a message to speak. My heart beats faster and my breath comes quicker. I feel shaky and cannot calm down until I rise

to speak. Once the message is complete, the quaking stops. Other Quakers have shared similar experiences with me.

Here is a quote from *New Studies in Mystical Religion* by Quaker Rufus M. Jones (1927): *The mystic, as I hope to show, is not a peculiarly favored mortal who by a lucky chance has received into his life a windfall from some heavenly Bread-fruit tree, while he lay dreaming of iridescent rainbows. He is, rather, a person who has cultivated, with more strenuous care and discipline than others have done, the native homing passion of the soul for the Beyond... The result is that he has occasions when the larger Life with which he feels himself kin seems to surround him and answer back to his soul's quest...*

Rufus Jones was fond of saying “the beyond is within.” Christ said, “The kingdom is within you.” Carl Jung likened us to an aspen grove, connected through roots he called the “collective unconscious”. He spoke of synchronicities that occur in everyday life which seem to reveal an underlying pattern and mystery to the Universe. Most of us have had an experience that gives us a glimpse into the Mystery.

For over thirteen years, I have been reading and writing for *What Canst Thou Say?* (<http://www.whatcanstthousay.org/>)—a Quaker publication featuring mystical experiences and contemplative practice. For the last three years I have been an editor. The writers for *WCTS* share stories of their experiences that have touched my heart and soul. They have helped me see that my own mystical experiences are not strange, but perhaps more common than I ever realized. Here are some examples:

- Calling a friend who has been on your mind and they say: “How did you know I was just thinking of you and about to call?” I’ve had the experience of picking up the phone to dial a friend and they are already on the line—I’d picked up their call before the phone even rang!
- Dreaming of someone and then running into them the next day.
- Finding just the right book or article at the moment you need it. I once found a much needed book lying in the middle of the living

room floor in a newly rented house which was otherwise empty. The same can be said of running into the right person at the right time who has an important message for us, or who may change the direction of our life.

- Experiencing a series of coincidences that lead us down a certain path in life, which later appear to be intentionally synchronistic in explicable ways. My journeys as a therapist and Quaker were marked by many such coincidences.
- Receiving important messages during meditation, Silent Worship or other times when we are still enough to hear the voice within. Sometimes these messages can come through like a lightning bolt and are accompanied by visions and hearing a voice that is not our own. From my experience, these are rare compared to the more quiet and ordinary messages.
- Feeling yourself disappear and become one with nature, or music, or movement.
- Becoming so immersed in the flow of an activity that you disappear and feel something is done through you. This has happened to me when writing, speaking and working as a therapist.
- That little “tap on the shoulder” along with a message which guides you to what you need. For example, helping you find your car keys or something you need in a store. The other day my partner was led to a thrift store he never frequents to find an obscure lid for one of my mother’s pots. Sure enough, it was there! And it was only 45 cents.

As you watch practical saints operate, in a great variety of affairs and under very different conditions, you soon see... they seem to be lending their hands to a larger life than their own. If they were asked, they would deny that they were mystics. “No, I am not a mystic. I have no mighty experiences. I am too practical and too commonplace ever to be a mystic.” My answer would be that there is no inconsistency between a mystical life and a practical life. The more truly mystical a person is, the

greater the probability that he will be effectively practical.” Rufus Jones, *New Studies*, p. 198-202.

Could we all be mystics and not know it? Can we open ourselves ever more to being conduits for the Light? Is Rufus Jones onto something when he suggests we can cultivate the “native homing passion of our souls for the Beyond?” What canst thou say about your own mystical experiences?

Postscript: If you have a mystical experience you would like to share, *What Canst Thou Say* welcomes submissions at any time, which you can send to rhondalou14@gmail.com.

By Rhonda Ashurst, Blog Contributor, Reno Friends Meeting

The opinions expressed above are not necessarily those of Reno Friends Meeting.

<https://www.friendsjournal.org/mysticism-quaker-faith/>

Mystical Experience, the Bedrock of Quaker Faith

February 1, 2017

By **Robert Atchley**

Mystical experience is direct experience of God. Quaker silence is an invitation to experience that of God within ourselves, and indeed within the entire perceivable universe. George Fox felt that we should “walk cheerfully over the earth, answering that of God in every person.” He also said, “Be staid in the principle of God in thee . . . that thou wilt find Him to be a God at hand.”

Rufus Jones (1863–1948) was arguably the foremost Quaker scholar, writer, and advocate of opening to mystical experience as a central practice among Friends. He built on foundations laid by Meister Eckhart, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, William James, and many other Christian mystics—people who had had direct experiences of God and tried to describe them. Jones

concluded that the founders of most great religions of the world got their spiritual understanding through mystical experience. The Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are filled with reports of direct experiences of God. Mystical experience “makes God sure to the person who has had the experience,” wrote Jones.

Jones cautioned against using the term “mysticism.” Each seeker of “God within” is confronted by a unique personal and cultural labyrinth that he or she must negotiate to directly experience God. Because each path is different, it is impossible “to make an ism out of” the journey to experience God. But perhaps we can agree that we seek direct experience of “the Divine Ground of All Being”—the term Christian theologian Paul Tillich used for the transcendent Holy Spirit. Perhaps we can agree that we are all dancing around a divine Light that eludes naming. Jones also pointed out that we are seeking our own direct experiences of God, not “second-hand descriptions” of mystical experiences in books and scriptures. However beautiful and uplifting Eckhart’s descriptions of his direct experiences of God might be, we cannot have his experience. We can only have our own.

Most mystics report experiencing God as immanent: God is here and now—palpably present to be experienced. God is also experienced as transcendent. God is infinite and therefore beyond our ability to completely perceive or understand, or even denote. But for many mystics, God’s infinite awareness can be intuited and is a super-magnet that can draw us out of our conventional personal and culture-bound consciousness and into a non-personal awareness that allows us to see with “eyes unclouded by fear or longing.” This is the vantage of the sage mystics who have many years’ experience viewing the world from a non-personal viewpoint. Sages have many years of practice abiding in a field that transcends our earthly concerns, yet sages also experience compassion and love for those—including the sages themselves—who endure the suffering involved in living a human life.

Is mystical experience rare? Apparently it is not. According to Jones, mystical experience is widely available, if we are tuned in to it. He wrote that “many people have had this vital experience.” God is everywhere we look, if we know how to look. In my 30 years of research on spirituality and aging, I found that many types of situations can evoke an experience of God within. Being in nature, meditation, contemplative waiting, religious rituals, singing hymns, reading sacred texts, and service to others are but a few of the situations in which people find themselves in touch with God within.

Among Friends, mystical experiences during meeting for worship are common, but only a minority of these experiences leads to vocal ministry. Why? Many times the experience is not in the form of words, and putting it into words is daunting. Often, direct experience of God is ineffable. As Eckhart noted, “As one’s awareness approaches the wilderness of the Godhead, no one is home.” Tillich called the Supreme Being “the God beyond God,” meaning that there is a field of Being beyond our personified God—the God who resembles us and speaks to us in our language. Tillich called this transcendent God “the Divine Ground of All Being.” Hindus call it “the Great Sea of Being.” The enormity of the Ground of All Being is very awe-inspiring and humbling to experience, yet it is comforting to abide in this field of ultimate, limitless Being.

Is there a knowledge element to mystical experience? Jones suggested in his book *The Radiant Life* that we use our experience as a guide for answering this question for ourselves. If we begin with questioning if there is “an intelligent, creative, organizing center of consciousness [that] transcends itself and knows what is beyond itself” and if our experience gives us a definite yes to that question, then we know and understand in a way that is guided and informed by mystical experience of God.

Jones wrote: “Spiritual ministry, in this or any age, comes through a prepared person who has been learning how to catch the mind of spirit, and how to speak to the condition of the age.” I wrote song lyrics that relate to this point: It takes practice to feel that deep

connection as the havoc of this world goes on and on. Soul-centered life has a deep attraction that ever draws me back for more and more.

We often need help in recognizing what we are seeing. Ken Wilber, in his book *Eye to Eye*, points out three main ways of knowing, or “eyes”: the eye of the flesh—sensory knowing; the eye of the mind—our dualistic cognitive processes of acquiring language, ideas, and meaning; and the eye of contemplation—our holistic, integral capacity to abide in non-doing. Each of these eyes has its injunction (if you do this), illumination (you may see that), and method of confirmation (knowing you really saw that). For Quaker contemplative knowing, “waiting upon the Lord” is the injunction, direct experience of God (mystical experience) is the illumination, and discernment is the confirmation. When Friends agree that someone is a “weighty Quaker,” the community’s discernment is confirming the validity of that Friend’s contemplative understanding.

Quaker spiritual practice involves much contemplative waiting, not waiting for something, but simply waiting. The region of my awareness where I have most often had direct experiences of God is deep, inner space. When I sit in meeting, I release into that space. Of course, my mind sometimes has stuff it is processing, and when that stuff arises, I release it. Over and over, I release. After a time, I am able to release into abiding in the vastness of inner space, where I experience God. I feel God’s palpable presence. I feel God drawing my awareness to a non-personal, transcendent level.

In his *Discourse on Thinking*, Martin Heidegger distinguished two very different types of thinking: calculative and contemplative. Calculative thinking is preoccupied with the surface of thinking and a thinking process aimed at dominating and manipulating situations and “re-presenting” or constructing experiences and stories. Contemplative thinking is deep thinking. It “contemplates the meaning that reigns in everything that is.” Contemplative thinking

requires that we develop the art of waiting. “Contemplative thought does not grasp the essence but rather releases into the essence.” Contemplative waiting is a practice of remaining open to experiencing God.

Friends who have waited together for decades often reflect this openness. They are secure in their faith because they have met God countless times along the way. Some of these meetings were dramatic experiences, and some were ordinary. These Friends are confident of God’s presence, even though this presence is revealed in different ways to different people. In my experience, the sages in our midst understand each other, often without much talk, because their mystical experiences over the years have been shared and are similar enough to be taken as roughly equivalent. There is not much vying or trying or hair-splitting among sages; they have released into the Divine Ground of All Being, where they increasingly abide. This does not mean that they are detached from the world—far from it. It simply means that they are aware of the deeper backdrop, the Divine Ground of All Being, as they play their part in everyday life.

The transcendent knowing that comes with spiritual maturity does not mean turning one’s back on prior stages of development. Wilber wrote that we “transcend and include.” Our transcendent, non-personal consciousness includes a deeply reflected upon version of what came before in our personal evolution. In most cases, this “transcend and include” process is conducive to a forgiving and accepting stance toward the earlier self.

At the start of their conscious spiritual journeys toward God, people often have immature faith that needs nurture and protection in the form of study, structured practice, and supportive community. As they grow more comfortable with their direct experiences of God, study becomes a reward and stimulus for openness. Structure becomes more utilitarian and less a means of protection. Community centers in the One.

From its beginnings, Quaker faith and practice has assumed that we are created with the capacity to influence our evolving experiential relationship with God. We are not passive, empty vessels hoping to

be filled. We have to move toward God, be open to God, be willing to meet God, and be guided by our experiences of God. For me, this has been a recurring feedback loop. I act from the non-personal, loving vantage that comes from connection with the Great Sea of Being. I observe the results of this enlightened action, which have always been vastly superior to the results of actions taken from a purely personal vantage. I am affirmed in my connection with God and that connection's influence on my capacity to see things more clearly than I could from a limited personal viewpoint. All this takes place with awareness of the Ground of All Being in the background.

Trusting this process required practicing it over and over. The proof is in the pudding. Of course, all my words are merely "fingers pointing at the moon." They are not the moon. You have to see the moon for yourself.