

ON BECOMING BROKEN AND TENDER MEETINGS

I recently had lunch with a woman who has not been active in my meeting for several years. She spoke more softly this time, but I could still hear the bitterness she felt when people criticized her for speaking about her love for Jesus in Worship. The wound is slowly healing, but she is not yet ready to return to meeting. Yet I also miss a man who was part of our meeting when I first came to Portland, then resigned his membership because our meeting was “too Christian” in his eyes and had no place for his atheism.

The language of faith can be the most difficult language a person can learn. It can open us to others in a way which leaves us vulnerable, or we can hide behind it as if it were armor, or even use it as a weapon of attack. When others use difficult language, we can respond in anger or we can be challenged to understand more of other people, ourselves, and God.

Can we learn to be at least bilingual? This is one of the challenges for all Friends today. If someone asks you: “Are You Saved?” What is your response? Do you get angry and declare “How can you ask such a question!!!” Do you take some deep breaths and empty your mind? Are you present to that person and what they are saying? I have had people ask me that question quite seriously, concerned for my soul if I don’t accept Jesus. But I have also had people ask it in a broad manner, wanting to know if I am right with the universe no matter what my faith. And I’ve had people ask me that to tease me and see how I respond.

“Are you saved?” and the phrase which I like to use, “How is the Spirit with Thee, Friend?” are both honest questions growing out of personal faith. How they are asked may indicate priorities in a person’s life, but when we type-cast people because of this, or give rote answers, we only show our own lack of trust in the Spirit.

So what does it mean to be perfect? to be whole? to be healed? to know unconditional love and come more and more to love unconditionally? This is the unusual kind of perfection which early Friends were convinced was possible

* It is a state of being attentive to the Spirit, the Inward Guide, Teacher, and Comforter.

* It is a transforming process of nurturing the Seed within your soul. This Seed will bring forth fruits of patience, truth, love, joy, peace, generosity, faithfulness and self-control.

* As the Seed grows, old wounds are healed and old pains lose their control over our lives. We may then come to willingly take up the

Cross. As we face the sometimes overwhelming and horrible realities of the world with the support of the Unseen Power that guides us, we then have the power to choose to live in ways so that we will not inflict more suffering on others and we will ease, as we are able, the injustices and pain which others face. In this we live out of that deep, eternal peace within our souls and convey hope to the world.

* In attending to this Seed within, we come to live out God's New Creation here on earth, a place where peace is possible, justice is known, mercy is abundant and humility governs.

* In our work and the huge demands of our busy lives, can we stop from time to time for periods of retirement? As we pay attention to our own well-being, and place our hopes and fears in the hands of the Spirit, we can be refreshed and renewed to continue our work with new energy and a clearer perspective.

As more and more of us grow into wholeness, we become more tender towards one another. The hard shells around our hearts are broken by the Holy One and we come to find community, support and right relationships with each other and with the Source. As we grow in the Spirit, we come to know ourselves as part of a tender and broken meeting.

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"A tender, broken meeting" by Marjorie Post Abbott, June, 2001, Keynote at Intermountain Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends