

Listening Spirituality: Personal Spiritual Practices Among Friends, Vol. I

By Patricia Loring

Listening Spirituality, Vol, I, is the first and most personally focused part of a three volume work on Quaker spiritual formation. It focuses on active and receptive practices for listening to the Spirit or, as Loring describes it, on “the widest kind of prayerful, discerning attentiveness to the Source intimated within us, evidenced through others, and discernable through the experiences of life.” (p. 2)

Loring’s goal is to assist us in moving more deeply into our inner life and the pattern of listening that “makes us more attentive and responsive to the Mystery within and among us, which gathers us in the Love and Life that is its very nature or being.” (p. 3)

This experience of deep and profound listening is at the heart of our gathering together in corporate worship and also the basis for our right relationship to “the rest of humanity and the whole of creation.” (p. 3) A second volume focusing on corporate spiritual practices has been published and a third one on Quaker ethics is in preparation.

In this first volume a variety of spiritual practices from the Quaker tradition and others as well are explored leading us toward “the still, small voice within” and opening us “to transformation through the Spirit of God.” (p. 6)

The first five chapters of the text are structured “in accordance with the *Lectio Divina*, the ancient, contemplative Benedictine discovery of an interior movement of prayer that begins with something outward—usually devotional reading, traditionally scripture—to focus or anchor our attentiveness to God. The movement of prayer proceeds through ways of reflecting or actively meditating on the focus. Then it moves onward to discovering—and actively praying, offering or expressing—the prayers, longings or feelings that arise in our hearts out of meditative reflection. Traditionally the last part of this process is the opening, listening, waiting or contemplative prayer of Christian tradition that, in some ways, resembles what is called meditation in Buddhist traditions.” (p. 6-7)

Chapter 6 examines “practices in which we try to bring the “listening attitudes of the heart and our sense of unity in the love of God out of our solitary personal practice and into our relationships with family, community, humanity and creation. The consequences are the foundation of our ethical life as Quakers.” (p. 7)

The final chapter is “transitional between the personal, interior, listening practices of this first volume and the corporate listening practices of the second volume... It gives special emphasis to ways listening to one another may support the personal practices and inner transformation of both the speaker and the listener.

Throughout the text there are ample references, resources, and recommendations for further in-depth exploration of key themes and practices that can make this journey in search of the Spirit one that lasts a lifetime.