

Listening Spirituality Forum (9-14-08)

Chapter I: Foundational Personal Practices in Support of Listening for God (from Vol. I of Listening Spirituality by Patricia Loring)

A. Personal spiritual practices in support of the inner life of God

These practices, which “can take many forms”, are presented in relation to traditional Quaker practice as it is connected either historically with the wider Christian tradition or functionally with the contemplative or mystical dimension of some of the great religious traditions” (p. 8).

1. Setting aside a time and place of retirement

We need a daily practice to reopen and reinforce our exclusive attention “to the movement of the Spirit...It’s important to be clear about...what it is we are doing” (pp. 8-9).

2. Find a place in which to meditate or pray

We are encouraged to experiment and find “what feels right or possible for you at this time in your life” (p. 11)

3. Discern the practice to which you’re led at this time

It is a gentle art to discern the right practices for you – “those that open or enhance the inner listening and speaking, hearing and responding at any given time” (p. 12). Discerning with reverence the “clues as to what will shape you and your life in a closer, more willing and loving relationship with God at this time” does not always lead to the easiest practice (p. 12). At first it may be helpful “to work by trial and error” (p. 12). This is not a process of analyzing each option “thoroughly (in order to) arrive at a reasoned decision. Rather, allow yourself to be worshipfully, intuitively open to what draws you, what seems full of promise, to what fits. Allow yourself to be wrong at first” (p. 12).

B. Devotional Reading

Patricia Loring suspects that this is “the most regular practice” among Friends. “Ultimately, what makes reading devotional is a mysterious fusion in the grace of God of the content and our intention to be opened to guidance”. Both sides of the process – the human and the divine – “are indispensable” (p. 13).

1. Spiritual Reading

On pp. 14-16, the author offers an excerpt from Douglas Steere’s Prayer and Worship.

2. Attentive reading, listening and waiting

a) Religious poetry

b) Mystics

c) Nature

d) Personal journals (being inspired by “the stories of others’ spiritual journeys”, p. 20)

e) Letters

f) Social order (Reading about people who have been “led into places of injustice, violence, pain and suffering in the world” can feed and strengthen us by providing reminders “of the Spirit working within the complex and often overwhelming realities “within which Friends my feel led to work (p. 22).

3. The Bible as devotional reading

Loring emphasizes that Friends have cherished the Bible as a source of spiritual illumination, with the stipulation that it must be read “in” the same Spirit its writers experienced” (p. 24).

In this section she offers several suggestions to the modern reader. In particular, we are encouraged to test scripture “against our own deepest experience of Truth” rather than testing it “against historical or scientific accounts of reality” (p. 24).