

Getting on Board with Friends Meeting

Gail Post



Photo: The author's boys awaiting a steam engine ride in Stroudsburg, Pa.

When my boys were young, they were obsessed with trains. Brio trains. Thomas trains. Real trains.

On long afternoons, we walked to the nearby train station, sat on a bench, and watched the trains go by. My children watched in awe – wide-eyed and mesmerized by the clash of screeching metal, the whirlwind of dust and debris, and the sheer enormity of the machinery.

But we rarely boarded the train; traveling with two rambunctious young boys was a challenge to be avoided whenever possible.

I realized how this previous train-watching experience echoed my own spiritual journey. I sat on the metaphorical bench for years, watching from afar while others readily jumped on board –

those hardy folks who found comfort in church services, or Bar Mitzvah prep, or the inward journey of a silent Buddhist retreat. My qualms with authority left me wary of spiritual leaders, a framework that seemed like standard practice in most traditional religions.

Unable to engage with any one religion, I remained benched on the sidelines – spiritually searching, watching from afar, but reluctant to commit.

Yet, when I stumbled upon Friends Meeting, something clicked. The core testimonies, the perspective that there is a bit of God within everyone, and that the Divine Light shines through us all, seemed like infinite wisdom. I felt led to ‘climb on board’ – first with occasional visits to Meeting for Worship, and later through active participation and eventual membership.

Initially, Meeting for Worship seemed puzzling. There are few obvious rules: no sermon, no pulpit, and no music, other than the rhythmic ticking of the clock. Over time, though, I learned to settle into the patient tempo of Meeting for Worship, a place where silence speaks volumes and where community with spiritual seekers provides comfort and connection.

The magic of “expectant waiting,” where Friends gather in community to engage with the Divine, is described in *Faith and Practice*¹:

“In the deepening stillness, worshippers let go of thoughts and distractions, open their hearts to the Light Within and listen for what truth God might give them. Vital worship depends on a deeply felt longing for God. Even in times of spiritual emptiness when unity and fulfillment seem distant, Friends find it necessary to be present with others in worship.”

Sometimes during Meeting for Worship, I am astonished when a thought or repetitive phrase circulating through my mind is then spoken aloud by another Friend during vocal ministry. Like intersecting train tracks, a pathway to spiritual engagement arises, silent and powerful; it emboldens our connection, often unleashing insight or wisdom or a salve to our troubles.

Way will open.

In the Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Members One of Another*, author Thomas Gates² comments: “In Quaker faith and practice, the individual and the meeting are in a dynamic, mutually supportive, and reciprocal relation... true community and true individuality reinforce one another.”

Gates points out that membership in Quaker Meeting is a “lifelong process of maturing and transformation,” which evolves and changes over time. He describes membership as:

“a spirit-led journey of coming to know ourselves as individual-in-community, a journey on which we experience Meeting as a place of acceptance, a place of shared values, a place of transformation.”

So, Get on Board: An Invitation

Each person's spiritual awakening follows its own trajectory. Each Friend forges their unique path, from hesitant visitor to active member. Some folks jump into the mix with gusto; others hold back, cautiously optimistic that they might claim this Meeting as their spiritual home. Some may drift away – especially young adults – but they often circle back and return.

If you are open to the possibilities, and if silent worship and spiritual connection appeal to you, this might just be your ticket to climb on board. And if you have already arrived, consider expanding your “spirit-led journey” through even deeper connection to the Meeting.

Wishing you well as you discover your spiritual path!

1. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. (2018). *Faith and practice (revised)*. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Publication.
2. Gates, Thomas. (2004). *Members one of another: The dynamics of membership in Quaker meeting*, Pamphlet 371, Pendle Hill Publications.

Bio: Gail Post is a licensed psychologist, author, and member of Abington Monthly Meeting.