

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE AND QUAKER PRACTICE

The ways in which society generally provides for collective discernment and decision-making are ill-designed to tap our collective intelligence and do much to explain our collective inability to discern and pursue the common good. The fact that adversarial debate is likely to fail to respect all needs and legitimate interests-and, at best, provide: for compromise-is fairly readily grasped. Where not all voices are equally heard, the neglect of some concerns may be acute. And where there is no mutual caring between parts and whole there is pathology, even death.

The challenge lies in leading those whose daily habit of mind and state of values development is not of the Quaker disposition and their habitual meeting behaviors not those that they need to manifest if they are to participate in the discernment of collective wisdom. Here the connection between individual and collective transformation, and the role of leadership, becomes apparent.

The essentials of Quaker practice, translated where necessary into secular terms, are as follows (no special order):

1. grounding of all participants in the desire for the common good
2. ensuring that all voices are heard and listened to
3. respect for all-both participants and those outside (but affected by) the decision making process
4. respect and caring for the agreed legitimate interests of all
5. maintaining community-loving relationship-as a primary concern
6. grounding of all participants in their own humanity and their experience of it during the meeting
7. sensitivity to interdependence-open systems thinking
8. speaking out of the silence (the state of being personally grounded)
9. addressing the clerk/facilitator not one another
10. speaking simply and not repeating what has already been offered
11. contributing personal perceptions and convictions-speaking one's own truth-without advocating that all should act on it
12. the commitment to air dissent
13. not using emotion to sway others while being authentic with the expression of feeling
14. distinguishing "threshing" meetings from meetings for decision-making
15. preparing factual and analytical material for assimilation prior to meetings for decision
16. the role of the clerk/facilitator in offering syntheses of the "sense of the meeting" that are progressively modified until there is unity
17. the role of the clerk/facilitator in resolving difficulty in coming to unity
18. decisions are made not by majority vote, nor by consensus, but by unity
19. the organisational structures that bring to bear the voices of many collectivities

Leonard Joy, leonardjoy@igc.org