

Exodus 3:2-6 - God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush, declaring that Moses stood on holy ground
While never out of a burning bush—and never in an audible voice...

There are times when I recognize that I am on holy ground
That God is present in a profound sense and that I'm in the midst of the Holy Presence
I generally don't know when or where it will come
This past week it came in the middle of the night
On occasion it has been in the middle of gathered worship

As Quakers we take seriously this thing of gathering in the Presence of God, inviting God to speak to us
Believing that God is here and that God is speaking—so we gather to Listen
There are times when the Speaking is so profound that we sense we are on Holy Ground
That the experience of God is perceptible and felt
It can come through human words—or through the deep silence
Sometimes it is in multiple voices—sometimes personal, other times communal
The sense that the “burning bush” has appeared in our midst and we are on Holy Ground is real

As Thomas Kelly suggests—such gathered meetings are times of group mysticism
Mysticism is centered in experience—the experience of the Presence of God
Jesus said, *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Matt 18:20*
In a gathered meeting there is a sense that a new Life and Power has entered our midst
There is also a sense in which we are all held as a community in that Life and Power
It is larger than me—or even two of us
It is gift from God—this sense that God has gathered us up into the Presence
Francis Howgill describes it this way, *“The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net... We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in...”*

Is there something we can do or are supposed to do in order to create opening for the Holy Ground?
In one sense... there is nothing we can do to cause God's imminence to be felt
It is God's free gift to us, given in love
On the other hand, coming to Meeting for worship, ready and anticipating God's Presence helps
For some to arrive with a sense of having been kindled prior to gathering with others
Then the flame spreads across the group, pulling others into the Presence of God
Those who gather and are already experiencing God's real Presence
Help those who enter worship, but are tangled, harried, or distraught, be able to center
So that all can enter into the Presence of God and hear God's message to all of us
Those who come pre-gathered and help us all settle and center—do their work invisibly
It isn't a look of rapt attention that we see and emulate
Nor is it the work of an assigned few—pastor, clerk, elder
It is an internal work of prayer and we are all called to it
It is “we” work in which we are called to lift up the group before God—holding us all
Holding us all up in the Presence of God—above that which distracts
Praying that Light will dispel the shadows

Being pre-gathered means a preceding preparation for worship—beginning at home and often in bed
To do the intentional work of being ready to gather with the community in worship
It is an invitation to live lives that are constantly centered in worship even while working/sleeping
Pay attention to those ways in which you feel yourself prepared to gather in worship
Notice and name the work you are doing to get ready to join in the community gathered

As we enter into the time set aside to gather together—knowing others will be here at this hour

We gather and hold each other up in prayer
We expect God to speak to us—knowing that God is present and speaking
We Listen deeply
We become comfortable with silence and don't feel compelled to fill it with words
We pay attention to the thoughts and nudges that come
We are willing to risk that God can and will speak to me through these thoughts and nudges
If a message comes, we are willing to share it publicly
We are content to share what came without needing to finish or go beyond what was given
 Trusting that if more is to be said—others will be given it
 Or it may be that there are multiple endings and it will be finished in people's hearts
As a person speaks, we listen—then we Listen with God for the deeper message

But what if a meeting has not been a gathered meeting? Are those meetings failures? Have we failed?

No
Rather the question is... Have we been faithful?
 If yes, it is enough
 If we are faithful, we may go home content

As a gathered community, we learn that to be faithful is enough

That our life together will ebb and flow—there will be mountains and valleys
 God is present in it all
We do not forsake gathering together in worship because there isn't a "wow factor"
Rather we are committed to the faithful gathering of God's people

*"The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net...
We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in..."*