IN THE MEADOW, I gave thanks beside a beech tree. Sunset neared after a beautiful day with Swarthmoor Area Meeting of Southwest Cumbria, England. This area is called “the cradle of Quakerism” and brings to mind The Valiant 60, the 17th-century law-breaking mystics and traveling ministers from this region. I laid down tobacco and sang with some tears. My thanks followed the beech’s roots toward a creek. Facing brightness between clouds, I bore witness to the Beauty of the land. I also prayed for Quakers and humans to make peace with Creation.

Soon after my arrival to Swarthmoor Hall, after listening to the One-Legged’s roots for wisdom, I found a very clear word on Right Relationship. It’s from Gerald Hewiston’s Journey Into Life: Inheriting the story of early Friends, the 2013 Swarthmore Lecture of Britain Yearly Meeting:

“We need to be in Right Relationship with our personal Inner Clerk, with the intense power of God, and with the community around us to whom we feel bound. Such right relationship is not a matter of words, or even deeds. It is a matter of being entire, complete, as a tree is wholly a tree, albeit root, trunk, bough, branch and leaf. With such complete integrity, entire wholeness, all actions flow from a state of ease and inner rest and poise. Acting from this condition, from this calm and balanced centre, all work is then Spirit-led activity. Our work as human beings is to align ourselves with blessed purposiveness, so that the outward work of our hands is the result of the inner work of our heart.”

Through Right Relationship, I experience our “community” as all of the Earth. This “being entire” is held together when humans respect that we are of the Earth, not separate from or “better than.” Such respect is found in lived experiences of North American First Nations whose remnants have survived genocide all-the-while foretelling what we now call “climate breakdown.”

This wisdom resonates among Quakerism’s roots because complete integrity was the aim of the first Friends. As they listened to the Light, they proclaimed spiritual Truth while standing up to Injustice. As Soldiers of the Lamb’s War, they carried faith-in-practice unto civil disobedience, often at high costs. Their aim echoes that of France Yearly Meeting’s 1943 Epistle: “We do not ask that you pray that we be safe. We ask that you pray that we be faithful.”
Such faithfulness is the stuff of Spirit-led activity. It arises from listening through the heart while bearing witness to the wholeness of All That Is, including its brokenness. That process resonates for me between Quakerism and indigenous wisdom based on lived experience. I’m a convinced Friend of Celtic-Irish Cherokee Descent who aims to honor the Earth as well as ancestors. Right Relationship speaks to me as The Beauty Path, which names the Beauty of All even in the worst of times.

Quakers’ nearest name for Beauty is the Light—or that of God—in All. The Beauty Path seeks out and co-creates harmony with all our Relatives: Standing People, Swimmers, Crawlers, Four Legged, Winged Ones, Water, and so on. The path resonates with Friends’ lived testimonies such as Peace and Equality. The wisdom and courage of Beauty is what I hear in George Fox’s 1663 epistle written while he was imprisoned:

“Sing and rejoice, ye Children of the Day and of the Light; for the Lord is at work In this thick Night of Darkness that may be felt: And Truth doth flourish as the Rose, and the Lilies do grow among the Thorns, and the Plants atop of the Hills, and upon them the Lambs do skip and play. And never heed the Tempests nor the Storms, Floods nor Rains, for the Seed Christ is over all, and doth reign. And so, be of good Faith, and Valiant for the Truth.”

In this moment of Creation, scientists detail how climate breakdown’s escalation is soaring beyond initial estimates. Some media outlets recall warnings by Western environmentalists from 50 years ago. Yet even among Quakers we have lost track of a deeper Truth. It has been First Nations who predicted these outcomes for centuries while naming the root problem: tearing the Circle of Life.

A way to mend this tearing is walking The Beauty Path to restore Right Relationship. For Friend Gerald, “[o]ur work as human beings” is “to align ourselves with blessed purposiveness.” It’s an alignment in step with peacemaking as put in Romans 12:18, “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (NRSV).

Right Relationship is transformative, from “the inner work of our heart” leading to “the outward work of our hands.” A grounding question to carry with us is from Jonathan Dale of Britain Yearly Meeting, “Do we recognize that we may need our hearts broken open if God is to break through?” Indeed, the Beauty Path embraces what Quakers name as “tender and broken”; these help to mend the Circle of Life.

May we listen to our roots. May we hear all the way down to the taproot of the shared Tree of Life. May we be courageous in walking The Beauty Path. May we be Valiant like our ancestors.

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