

## **Next Steps**

by Lu Harper

Our experience in the School of the Spirit can be so intense that we may feel a void in our life after we complete a program like *On Being a Spiritual Nurturer*, wondering what's next? Welcome (again) to that liminal space of waiting—waiting upon Spirit, waiting for the dawn to break, waiting for closing doors and opening doors. Hold this time lightly. What seeds are already present in thy life?

First, ground yourself in the daily. Do your work. Reconnect with your meeting. Maintain the deep friendships you've made in the School of the Spirit. Continue work you have already started. Second, pay attention. What rises up in prayer? What small nudges do you notice? Open yourself to these possibilities and take a step. Repeat.

I found myself writing a Pendle Hill pamphlet after completing the School of the Spirit Ministry's program *On Being a Spiritual Nurturer* in just this way. In worship at a regional meeting, I was nudged to offer an hour-long Bible study based in the writings of early Friends for our next gathering. As I prepared, I found the texts speaking to me, not just of the Bible passages, but also of how early Friends experienced reading the Bible "in the Spirit." I worked with an elder from my meeting to ground my preparation.

When the Bible study was over, the material was not done working with me, so I started to read more, and to write. Over the next year, various experiences informed my writing. One came at a School of the Spirit Ministry retreat:

*During Meeting for Worship recently, I watched as the sun moved behind the person sitting next to me and cast her shadow before her. The shadow, framed by the outline of the window, looked like a keyhole. It was opened to me that just as our outward shadows naturally correspond to our outward bodies, our inward shadows correspond to our inward condition. Light and shadow speak of and answer our condition as a key "answers," or opens, a lock. As without, so within, our spiritual condition, light and dark, will speak to others. This correspondence, without judgment, simply is. I experienced it as a call to pay attention to my life in the Spirit, that I may live in such a way that my being, my condition, answers that of God in others.*

The time of writing was led. As I have experienced at other times in my life, I was impelled to sit down every day, to pick up where I had left off, to work, re-work, until my writing began to speak out of the invitation I had experienced. When faced with doubts about submitting it for publication, a classmate reminded me that it was a message.

In recent months, as I near the end of the editing process, I once again have wondered, what's next? Sending a message out into the world is like tossing a pebble in a still pond. The ripples come out, to meet other things and cause new ripples. What's next? Part of the answer I have come to is to return to waiting again ... to wait for the ripples of this work to settle, in the meantime being faithful in answering whatever responses come. There is a rest in knowing that if I stay open, if I pay attention, I will be led as way opens into whatever is next.

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