

Holding a Meeting for Clearness – Short Workshop Version

Whether we are activists or engaged in acting in the world in other ways, we may often feel divided over a course of action. Not just between ourselves, but within ourselves. A meeting for clearness is process to help a *focus person* to clarify their thinking and their calling around a demanding issue. It is especially helpful for those who might be *working under concern*, that is, who might feel a particular calling in their lives. That might involve a career move, a relationship, a conflict, a path of activism, or their inner psychological and/or spiritual journey. This exercise is a short version of what will usually be given more time, perhaps over two or three sessions. You will be divided into small groups. These are your instructions. The purpose is to learn about seeking *clearness*, and to experience how group *discernment* can help to hold a challenging matter in the light of a community and its spiritual underpinning.

1. The first stage is to select a *facilitator*. Begin in silence. Allow two or three minutes to settle. If somebody has such skills, please volunteer if you feel so moved. If nobody feels they have the skills, somebody offer to play the part anyway. The facilitator's role is to mind the clock and, if necessary, to remind people to the process.
2. Next, repeat the discernment process to find a volunteer *focus person*. Each of you may have issues that you might like to have discerned. Hopefully, somebody will suggest an issue that can be framed into a *focus question*. Some examples are given overleaf.
3. If there is a second suggested focus question, hear it. The facilitator may then encourage the group to decide which one might best serve the learning process. Perhaps choose the one that most speaks to concerns that others in the group might carry. Do not spend a lot of time on this. If the choice is six and half a dozen, toss a coin.
4. The facilitator then invites the chosen focus person to repeat their question as a single sentence. The participants may wish to write this down and use it to hold focus.
5. The group then enters a period of silence, perhaps five minutes, to allow reflection on the focus question. When they feel ready, the focus person introduces their issue. As this is a short exercise, try to keep it to within five minutes.
6. Allow stillness for the focus person's introduction to their question to settle. The other participants then ask questions if and when they feel inwardly moved to do so.
7. Questions should be focussed, crisp and open; not rambling, leading, judgemental or suggesting their own answers. Allow a short space for reflection between questions and responses, and before moving to the next question. Try to work as a group moved by a common spirit, even a discernment of the life's Spirit, and not merely as individuals.
8. If need be in this learning exercise, the facilitator may gently hold order, making sure that everyone who is moved to speak has their chance. For those who might not speak, holding a *gathered* space through presence, is equally important.
9. About 30 minutes before the end, the facilitator invites any further questions that might call to be asked. In the final 15 minutes, they indicate *laying down* the process by asking the focus person how it has been for them. The participants, if so moved (and if there is time), can also be invited to share a point that might have especially spoken to them.
10. What was discussed in the meeting stays within the meeting. In plenary discussion afterwards, you may share of what you learned about discerning clearness, but not what the focus person spoke about or who they were, unless they choose to share any of it.

Examples of Focus Questions

- I seek clearness as to whether to allow myself to be arrested at the protest, or whether to focus on my job/family/exams/recovery.
- I seek clearness as to whether to stay in the group/church/job/ or whether to withdraw.
- I seek clearness as to whether first to sort out my money worries, or just get on with doing what I'm called to.
- I seek clearness as to whether to persevere, even though my faith in what it is about has almost gone.
- I seek clearness as to the balance between sorting out my own problems, and putting my all into the cause.
- I seek clearness as to how to deal with somebody who is undermining my efforts.
- I seek clearness as to whether to give more time to a dependent person, or concentrate on what might be a different calling.
- I seek clearness as to whether to start a family, or to see the world as my family.
- I seek clearness as to where to find and cultivate beauty/community/friendship in my life.

Examples of Clearness Questions

- What do you most deeply seek in this situation?
- Where might lie an opening of the way?
- How would you know if you felt you were on the right path?
- If you were free of these demands, what would you do instead?
- Who or what are your allies and who or what hinders you in this journey?
- In a perfect world, what outcome would you most desire?
- In an imperfect world, what outcome could you make the best of?
- If you do/don't do this, what difference would it make to you / the cause?
- What spiritual support do you need in this?
- What do you feel is the deep calling of life/spirit/God/dharma/righteousness in this?
- What parts of this give life, and what drains life within you?
- What decisions/outcomes might you most look back on, with satisfaction?

Some Suggested Reading

Tova Green, Peter Woodrow & Fran Peavey, *Insight and Action: How to Discover and Support a Life of Integrity and Commitment to Change*, New Society, Gabriola Island, 1994 (out of print, but 2nd hand).

Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, Jossey-Bass, SF, 2004.

Michael J. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends*, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Philadelphia, 1983.

Alastair McIntosh & Matt Carmichael, *Spiritual Activism: Leadership as Service*, Green Books, Cambridge, 2016.