

Ten reasons

Kate Graham, integrative psychotherapist, describes how Quakerism influences her work

Being asked to write this article stops me in my tracks. What is my worldview? And what is it right now? Because while some core values underpin what I do, my sense of possibility and potential is growing and changing. I am learning new aspects of spirituality all the time – in particular, through practices of contemplation and therapeutic Shamanism. I've just written a book about faith in the therapy room and I am an active Quaker. But do I have something distinctly 'Quakerly' to say?

My father, also a Quaker and a therapist, sees the connection as a piece of knitting, made up of wool of many colours and textures

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) broke from the established church in the mid 17th Century. It was very popular, though now counts just 17,000 members in the UK and about 400,000 globally. Quakers have widely varying beliefs and practices, but share a commitment to truth and honesty, to peace, simplicity, equality and to seeing that of God in everyone, including ourselves. Quakers in the UK don't have priests, and have a tradition of silent worship. Seeking to face our dark side and to connect with the less

acceptable parts of ourselves is an important part of the spiritual journey. Quakers believe in connecting our inner spirituality to external action: standing for social justice both locally and globally (including being one of the earliest churches to recognise same sex marriages); campaigning for the right to non-violent protest and working at a global level for climate justice.

My book, *Mystery Hope and Reason*, was written as an entry-level text, to help people get started on talking about faith. I also realised, to varying degrees, as it grew, that it was my entry-level too. At one point, a friend challenged me to state my position rather than being so even-handed throughout. I felt I needed to come out as a spiritual therapist and to share my beliefs. Which are that I believe in mystery, in listening to my body and in a connection with nature – and I believe in helping my clients and supervisees to make these connections. I welcome the unknown and the possible into the therapy room.

How does that translate into therapy? My father, also a Quaker and a therapist, sees the connection as a piece of knitting, made up of wool of many colours and textures. The Quaker wool is one such strand, entwined with colours from other aspects of our lives, training and history. The overall shape and balance of colours depend on how we knit them together, how much wool of each colour we choose and how we combine them. And the combination changes as we grow.

These are my own reasons for how I work.

1 It supports integration

Spiritual growth requires connection and integration. My therapeutic approach is both integrative in process, combining different modalities, and integrative in intention. Given my own baggage, I needed to find acceptance for my different parts, get them talking to each other, and find my place in the world. This is what I offer, and much of my work involves people exploring and accepting the less desirable parts of themselves. As we shine a light into our shadow and come to terms with what we see, we can release compassion and growth.

2 The idea of 'That of God in everyone' can be supportive

Our relationships are central to finding our way in the world and the relationship between therapist and client allows patterns to get played out and responded to differently. This requires vulnerability for both therapist and client, and sometimes this can be difficult. If I'm struggling, maybe because I feel afraid of the other person's judgment or expectations, my Quaker belief that there is God in everyone can be really helpful. I find when I am working with someone I am finding myself unsettled by, or maybe even feeling a bit scared of, I can remind myself of this, which opens me to compassion, and thus to them.



3 It opens up conversations about God

I feel comfortable asking about God/ Divine/spiritual essence/love, particularly if the client is a person of faith. I want to welcome the whole person, even if, in reality, we are two quite incomplete people searching for wholeness. In my book, I describe how I took a risk with a client with a strong faith that she was struggling with, and shared something of my own beliefs.¹ It was a risk that ultimately proved helpful, as my openness and consequent vulnerability laid a bedrock of trust which allowed the client to explore her beliefs more fully and make the changes she wished to make. It showed me the power of opening the space to mystery and the Divine.

4 Being open and listening is therapeutic

Not all Quakers like talking about God but I find asking people about their faith is often helpful. Refugees have taught me how their faith kept them going through incredibly difficult times. This work gave me a profound respect for Islam in particular, and the power of communal prayer and fasting. Listening enhanced my faith: partly showing me I wanted that clarity and commitment, partly teaching the practice of respectful listening. And as I listened, I changed.

5 My faith has deepened my relationship with silence

Quakerism has taught me to love silence but not all clients do. Some people hate it and I appreciate this, as I have no desire to make people feel uncomfortable. That isn't the point of therapy. An attentive silence is powerful, and can be helpful at the right time, combined with stillness, listening and paying attention to the parts of ourselves that start to appear in the space.

6 It teaches presence

Quakers value openness and honesty. This shines through in my choice to work in a relational manner, bringing myself into the work, using my embodied presence as a tool to support the therapy and to help clients connect with their bodies and develop their presence and awareness from that place.

Ten reasons

Shamanism is deepening my practice, opening up the possibilities where help may be needed to a soul level, opening up the boundaries of what counts as reality. Exploring 'non-ordinary reality' through non-drug-induced journeying offers new insights that might have been kept at bay by a rational mind. This isn't such a departure from psychotherapy (or Quakerism) as it might sound. Paul Francis, who writes and teaches on modern shamanism, is a psychotherapist. Central to both practices is an ethical core, deepened by my Quaker practice. Our work is to serve the client, to do no harm, to empower them to find their own way.

7 Spirit-led moments can occur

Francis also describes shamanic practice as 'spirit-led' rather than knowledge, evidence or tradition-based.² And increasingly, I hope to allow this in my therapy sessions. I try to get out of my own way to allow clarity and insight to emerge in the room. There is a real mystery to the work of therapy. Two people voyage into the unknown, face uncertainty together and start to notice how they are reacting to each other and what is emerging between them. To me, this is a deeply spiritual process if we can only let it be so.

8 It offers the possibility of a wider connection

Spirituality, to me, is about connection: to our bodies, to ourselves, to our breath and to each other. It is also a quest for connection to something greater than ourselves. It is common in a Quaker meeting for someone to stand up and minister about something you have been thinking about, however off-beat. In therapy, when two people are really present with each other, mystery appears in the stillness, sometimes as intuitive insights, sometimes as a sense of God in the room – whether called in or not. This can bring strength to both therapist and client.

9 Grounding and prayer are useful therapeutic tools

I have long done some form of grounding prayer at the start of the day. I find the Iona healing prayer* very helpful and I now also use an invocation to the spirits of each compass point.³ I notice that I have never prayed with or for a client but I do ask people to look at trees more now.

10 It brings a measure of comfort

As I reflect, I notice the non-spiritual question emerging of what might be acceptable, seen as adequately professional: and whether nine reasons would be as good as 10. I sit back to ask the spirit to guide my words. I let stillness descend, my breathing deepen and shoulders relax. Early Quaker words, spoken by Caroline Fox in 1841 come to me: 'Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee.'⁴ ●

* 'Spirit of the living God, present with me/us/you now, enter me/us/you in body mind and spirit and heal me/us/you of all that harms you, In Jesus' name Amen.'³

References

- 1 Graham K. *Mystery, hope and reason: faith in the therapy room*. London: Karnac Books; 2026.
- 2 Francis P. *The shamanic journey: a practical guide to therapeutic shamanism*. UK: Paul Francis; 2017.
- 3 Iona Community. *Iona Abbey worship book*. Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications; 2017.
- 4 Britain Yearly Meeting. *Quaker faith and practice: the book of Christian discipline of the yearly meeting of the religious society of friends (Quakers) in Britain*. London: Britain Yearly Meeting; 2013.

Kate Graham is a UKCP-accredited psychotherapist, supervisor and Quaker. Before becoming a psychotherapist, Kate enjoyed a wide-ranging career incorporating charity fundraising and leadership, international development and coaching. She is fascinated by our internal and spiritual journeys and loves walking and swimming in the River Wharfe.