

## Reflections from a Solitary Meeting for Worship

By John Andrew Gallery. Pendle Hill Pamphlets (number 469), 2021. 30 pages. \$7.50/paperback or eBook.

Reviewed by Claire J. Salkowski

During the last few years, we have all been affected by the COVID pandemic in myriad ways. Life has been upended, and we have been forced to view our lives from different lenses. Due to the various strains of the virus, COVID's impacts seem to be ongoing and never-ending, causing meetings to re-evaluate the way meeting for worship is conducted.

In the early years of the pandemic, most meetings were closed, and Quakers sought alternative ways to conduct worship sharing. Author John Andrew Gallery chose to create his own "solitary meeting for worship." This Pendle Hill pamphlet is the result of his insightful and thought-provoking reflections on those meetings conducted during his self-isolation that began in March 2020

from the domain of his own home.

Gallery's technique for writing his reflections was well-practiced in an earlier publication in which he wrote of his experiences in a prayer vigil for peace. His new, small volume does not disappoint. This pamphlet includes only nine of the twenty-two essays written during this time; the additional essays are available on his website ([johnandrewgallery.com](http://johnandrewgallery.com)). Once you read this small collection, you'll want to read the remaining essays, as the author's style is at once down-to-earth and personally engaging yet philosophic and provocative: he leads you to consider issues pertaining to deep theological thought and spiritual seeking.

Gallery finds company and inspiration in the words and works of such renowned and diverse figures as Buddha, Jesus, Henry David Thoreau, Marcus Aurelius, Siddhartha, Abraham, and George Fox. In the silence of his solitary meetings, he is led to consider the weighty questions that arise in a spiritual search for deep understanding and guidance for ethical living. Gallery writes in such a personal way that he pulls the reader in and makes one feel that one is a dear friend in whom he has confided and who gladly accompanies him on his journey.

He is open and honest, often poking fun at himself, using a delightfully humorous tone. As each essay unfolds, the journey becomes one's own.

As Gallery shares his readings, messages, musings, and remembrances, he weaves a connecting thread through classic works, such as Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*; *Meditations* by Marcus Aurelius; and the King James Version of the Bible, to name a few. He candidly explores such themes as mindfulness and acceptance; surrender and control; suffering and imperfection; the solitary search for enlightenment; and the support and inspiration of a spiritual community, all in conversational tones. Yet his deeply personal queries probe ancient and universal questions regarding time, trust, and the "certainty of faith" within the context of numerous world religions and many faiths. Gallery spreads a wide net and gathers in the many gems contained in the sea of spiritual thought that arises in his solitary meetings for worship. As a fellow Quaker and seeker, I was delighted to share the journey with him and to learn from his considerable wisdom and honest contributions.

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