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NOTE: THIS IS THE FACILITATOR'S COPY OF THE COURSE OUTLINE

Participants need not print or read this version (though anyone is welcome to peruse)

**Course Title:** Uh oh, Was That a Leading?

**Description:** The Quaker faith is based on the ideal of direct communication with the divine as guidance for our thoughts and actions. It is a beautiful and uplifting ideal but a little sparse on details. What is a leading? How do we know when we're being led? And how can we know when we are definitely *not* being led? Although there are no simple answers to these questions, the very least we can do is put our heads together. This mini-course aims to first ground our understanding of leadings in the Early Friends and the ways they understood Scripture. Then we will tour the way Friends throughout history have answered this perennial Quaker question. But central to the whole course is the chance to share our experience of Spirit in our lives.

**Version 2**

## Session 1: Introductions ..... pp. 2

### Session 1 Content Outline:

Worship (< 5 minutes)

Introductions (10 minutes)

Topic Summary (5 minutes)

Goals and purpose of the course

My goals: Sharing testimony (15 minutes)

Deepened faith

Build community

Deepened understanding of the symbol of leadings

Ground rules (15 minutes)

Duration

Floor

Interrupting

Spiritual background

Confidentiality

Kindness

Time

Additional considerations (missing courses, people adding later, potential 6 session, call with any special needs etc.)

Movement of Spirit in our Lives (15 minutes)

Opening Question (for a non-Quaker) (10 minutes)

Readings and discussion (30 minutes)

Closing (Questions, Homework, Check-out) (5 minutes)

Close with silence (5 minutes)

### Opening worship

Less than 5 minutes (ask participants to hold the course in the light beforehand)

The intention of giving time indications is not to be rigid but to give a sense of the intention with respect to time and also to help the facilitator and participants respect time limits. If time limits are consistently overshot, then the facilitator may want to start announcing these while framing the topic.

### Introductions

Name, meeting, how are you?, a fun (or not so fun?) project you're working on these days

Check-in: if you could describe your state of being coming into this course in an imaginary object, what “object” are you arriving with today? (Note: feel free to adapt this somewhat-silly phrasing. The goal here is to sound out the state of being of participants, be aware of any potential fragile emotions (e.g. a stressful day).)

5 minutes (10 minutes)

Topic:

**Facilitator:** Ground everyone in the topic.

This course is about leadings, perhaps the central symbol of Quakerism

A vast and daunting topic

Everyone on earth has leadings, whether they call it that or not.

As Quakers, we have traditions and tacit beliefs about how leadings happen that shape our form of worship and the way we make communal decisions

Leadings are crucial to our practice of silence, our testimonies of equality, simplicity, and even peace

For those who need a course that is always concrete and tangible, with rigidly defined concepts, or those who want knowledge about leadings handed to you on a platter, they may want to take this opportunity to head for the hills.

But for those willing to risk discussing something a bit ineffable, mystical and mysterious, I do believe this course will deepen our discernment

Although the traditional metaphor is “a leading from the Holy Spirit,” even non-theist Quakers talk about leadings

One of the central goals of this course is sharing stories. Our stories make leadings concrete for all of us.

5 minutes (15)

Goals and purpose of the course:

**Go around:** What are you hoping to get out of this course?

**Optional question:** Why do you think this course is called “Uh oh, was that a leading?”? What did this title mean to you?

(One potential answer if people are stumped: ... because so often, we are living relatively comfortable, convenient, tranquil lives when, against our will, we are occasionally called to make our lives far more uncomfortable, inconvenient, messy, and stressful. Or perhaps our lives already feel overwhelming yet we feel called to do more. The thought that God can phone us up anytime and order us to sacrifice everything—for instance by engaging in nonviolent civil disobedience that could get us a fine we cannot afford or jail-time—is sobering at best. Certainly, God is generous with us and most leadings are a profound pleasure to fulfill. Yet,

mindful of the demise of Jesus or the stoning of George Fox for instance, who doesn't feel a bit of trepidation when some fresh leading enters our lives? Our Quaker faith is not always easy."

**Facilitator:** (Optional) **Say** something like: Let us hold everyone's questions in the Light throughout this course and beyond, and hope that all of us will find the clarity we seek.

**Facilitator:** *Give an overview of the course, what will be done and discussed during the 5-6 sessions.*

15 minutes (30)

Be sure to set the ground rules:

**Facilitator:** See [Facilitator Guide](#) for much more detail about setting the tone for this first course

#### Duration

Between 1.5 and 2 hours, depending on number of people  
5 or 6 sessions, weekly

Go through topics:

Questions?

#### Who has the floor?

A method for determining whose turn it is to speak (tricky by phone)

The goal is to be able to focus on content

Claremont dialogue vs. popcorn-style

If popcorn, must limit speaking to once per round

#### Interrupting (by facilitator or others)

Use restraint

Technical difficulties (breaking up, I can't hear)

Safety (e.g. emotional safety)

Time constraints

Clarification, if this is absolutely necessary, immediately, for everyone to follow and cannot be clarified later

Regrounding the conversation in worship and purpose, following a necessary order of discussion

#### Theological difference

We have differences: this is a strength but can make these conversations hard

Listening in tongues

Go-around for theology (not more than three sentences)

#### **Start with the facilitator**

Got translations ready for Christology? God? Spirit? Spirit guide?

We can be afraid to speak the language of our heart for fear it will not resonate for others

Sometimes, unless we have translations ready, the language of religions doesn't resonate or, our first thought can be "what a load of..."

Identify "danger zones," where difference can hurt feelings

The oops / ouch system

Not an interruption :)

Oops is only for ourselves :)

Plain speak about me: not Christian but need Christianity to get Quakers

Plus, I find the "classic metaphor" method of explaining Quakers to be a lot simpler

Confidentiality

How far will this information travel?

I suggest anonymity for sensitive stories, use caution

Kindness

So everyone here has always immediately obeyed every leading they've ever experienced, right?

This course could be painful for imperfect people, e.g. this course is about sin  
Fear of being a "bad Quaker"

We need a generous spirit, kindness to ourselves and others. A tone we set every minute of this course, in everything we do.

But this course is not negative because every leading is proof of forgiveness.  
Christians would call this the "good news"

Time (on painful transitions to the next section)

The last session is open space—we can return to any section of the course, tell stories, or talk about something new.

Before, it may feel rushed or too many topics or like you didn't get to say what you wanted. This is relatively on purpose

First, general time constraints and a big topic

Second, Quaker-like, we discern together the deeper exploration

Third, I want you to have the flame to discuss course themes with others.

15 minutes

(30 minutes overall for this section) (1 hour)

CONTENT:

### **The movement of Spirit in our lives**

**Facilitator:** Before the below question, **say** something along the lines of: "I do not have all the answers but if you are willing to hold me in the Light, Friends, then perhaps I can help facilitate the movement of Spirit among us. I think the richest part of our time together is the chance we

have to share stories about the way Spirit moves in our lives, but in particular our struggles with how we are led, be they successes or delayed successes.”

(Assuming everyone present is quite familiar with Quakers): **Ask everyone to (briefly?) describe a leading that has changed their lives.**

**Facilitator note #1:** tell the first story. This models for everyone the length of the story and the emotional vulnerability you’re looking for.

**Note #2:** Probably no need to ask the impact of following or not-following a leading—I suspect most will weave this into their tale. In any case, this can be a follow-up question.

**Note #3:** This should have been assigned as homework leading up to the first course. This is not being asked “on the spot” but should be a relatively prepared story. However, if someone genuinely couldn’t think of a single leading in their entire lives, then they may as well pass. I suspect, however, that stories will come to them in listening to others. It may be worth checking back in.

15 minutes (1h15)

Opening question:

(Assuming everyone present is quite familiar with Quakers)

Don’t worry about making this perfect or great or anything. I didn’t assign it as homework because I want this also to be a bellwether of where you’re at coming in. We may all get asked about Quakerism at surprising moments.

“If someone off the street who only knew a little about Quakerism asked you, ‘What *is* a leading?’ how would you respond? Don’t let their eyes glaze over: this needs to be a snappy but honest response.”

(Give time for go arounds)

**The facilitator answers this question last.**

Note: This is also a pre-test, for we will ask the question at the end of the last session to measure the growth in knowledge and confidence.

Sample response: “A leading is an action we intuitively know is right for us.”

10 minutes (1h25)

Leadings:

See [Reading and Homework: Session 1](#)

What did you most remember, what did you wonder about? What inspired, surprised, displeased you about these quotes?

30 minutes (1h55)

Closing:

Further questions that I expect will guide much of the rest of this course:

- What's the benefit of talking about leadings? What do we gain by *not* talking about them?
- How have Quakers understood leadings differently over time and how does that enrich my understanding today?
- Isn't it a lil' crazy to think that God "talks to us"?

Homework for Session 2:

Come with one leading-win and one leading-fail (can be a temporary fail) from this week (ideally from the week, but over the lifetime is fine). In other words, one time this week when we detected a leading and followed it, and one time when we detected a leading and did something else, at least temporarily.

**(Note #1:** the goal is to focus our attention this week on the moving of Spirit in our lives *and* our freedom relative to those leadings. **Note 2:** I intend the phrase "leading-fail" to be melodramatic and silly.)

**Facilitator, say:** Do assigned readings as led

Check-out:

How was this first session? What was one thing that was stimulating, challenging, exciting, scary?

Facilitator

(5 minutes total)

We close with silence

(Less than 5 minutes)

**(Total: ~ 2 hours, with some nudging)**

## Session 2: Early Friends: Theology in the Age of Guilt ..... pp. 8

### CONTENT:

We open with silence (5 minutes)

Check-in (5 minutes)

Review the ground rules (5 minutes)

The movement of spirit in our lives (15 minutes)

Opening question (10 minutes)

Readings and reaction (60 minutes)

Closing (homework, check-out) (10 minutes)

We close with silence (5 minutes)

(Total: 115 minutes)

Silence (Less than 5 minutes)

Check-in (5 minutes, 10 total)

Review the ground rules (established in the first session) (5 minutes, 15 total)

The movement of spirit in our lives:

**Homework from Session 1.** Share everyone's leading-win and leading-fail.

**Facilitator:** tell the first story. This models for everyone the length of the story and the emotional vulnerability.

**Facilitator note #1:** I intend the phrase "leading-fail" to be melodramatic and silly.

**#2:** Leading-fails are an opportunity to note the miracle of forgiveness or what some symbolically call grace.

**#3:** Probably no need to ask the impact of following or not-following a leading—I suspect most will weave this impact into their tale. In any case, this can be a follow-up question.

**Brief discussion:** How does it impact us to hear these stories?

**#4:** Challenge participants to begin weaving course themes into their recounting of their leading-win and leading-fails.

15 minutes (now that we have two stories rather than one) (30 minutes total)

Opening question:

(Assuming everyone present is quite familiar with Quakers):



If someone off the street who only knew a little about Quakerism asked you, “What is your relationship to the things Early Friends believed and did?” how would you answer? This needs to be a snappy but honest response; don’t let their eyes glaze over.

**The facilitator answers this question last.**

**Optional question:** what does the word “Spirit,” as in a “prompting of Spirit” mean to you? If it doesn’t mean anything, would a translation be helpful? This translation may assist in understanding this session.

(10 minutes, 40 total)

Early Friends quotes:

See [Reading and Homework: Session 2](#)

What parts spoke to you? What inspired, surprised, displeased you about these quotes?

(60 minutes, 1 hour 40 total)

Closing:

**Homework:**

So far we’ve talked about leading-wins and leading-fails. This week, the homework is to think about leading-gaps—a time when that “still, small voice” is so still and so small that it’s inaudible. Unlike the course title, this is “Uh oh, I don’t hear a leading.” Since so much of the millenarian thesis, so to speak, is that Spirit is already present to all (and I’m saying that’s not true, cf. consumerism), how does Spirit’s *absence* impact our day-to-day lives? The homework is to seek a leading for every decision, even the most tiny, until a leading does not come.

Perhaps try this a few times. What I’m interested in is our reaction to the lack of a leading. What feelings and thoughts come up? What options do we have? What is the best we can do in this situation? Quakerism seemingly calls for us to follow a leading for *every* decision in our lives, no matter how small, and where a leading-gap arises, to sit in expectant waiting and discernment—but isn’t that unrealistic? What happens when we let go of trying to live entirely from leadings (and this is almost (if not completely) inevitable) and use other ways to arrive at decisions? Or do you find that leadings are equally available in every moment?

This “homework” may prove painful. So, essential to this assignment are both a whole lot of letting go and also the intention to be gentle with ourselves. Be ready to give one example about the choices we face when we live a “leading-gap.”

Check-out:

How was this session? What was stimulating, challenging, exciting, scary

(10 minutes, 1 hour 50 total)

Closing worship

(5 minutes, 1 hour 55 total)

## Session 3: Quakers after Freud: emotional and physical signs of leadings ..... pp. 12

### CONTENT:

We open with silence (5 minutes)

Check-in (5 minutes)

Review the ground rules (5 minutes)

The movement of spirit in our lives (20 minutes)

Opening question (15 minutes)

Readings and reaction (50 minutes)

Closing (homework, check-out) (10 minutes)

We close with silence (5 minutes)

(120 minutes)

Silence (5 minutes)

Check-in (5 minutes, 10 total)

Review the ground rules (5 minutes, 15)

The movement of spirit in our lives: (20 minutes, 35)

**Homework from Session 2.** So far we've talked about leading-wins and leading-fails. This week, the homework is to think about leading-gaps—a time when that “still, small voice” is so still and so small that it's inaudible. Unlike the course title, this is “Uh oh, I don't hear a leading.” Since so much of the millenarian thesis, so to speak, is that Spirit is already present to all (and I'm saying that's not true, cf. consumerism), how does Spirit's *absence* impact our day-to-day lives? The homework is to seek a leading for every decision, even the most tiny, until a leading does not come. Perhaps try this a few times. What I'm interested in is our reaction to the lack of a leading. What feelings and thoughts come up? What options do we have? What is the best we can do in this situation? Quakerism seemingly calls for us to follow a leading for every decision in our lives, no matter how small, and where a leading-gap arises, to sit in expectant waiting and discernment—but isn't that unrealistic? What happens when we let go of trying to live entirely from leadings (and this is almost (if not completely) inevitable) and use other ways to arrive at decisions? Or do you find that leadings are equally available in every moment?

This “homework” may prove painful. So, essential to this assignment are both a whole lot of letting go and also the intention to be gentle with ourselves. Be ready to give one example about the choices we face when we live a “leading-gap.”

**Facilitator:** tell the first story. This models for everyone the length of the story and the emotional vulnerability.

**Facilitator note #1:** I intend the phrase “leading-fail” to be melodramatic and silly.

**#2:** Leading-fails are an opportunity to note the miracle of forgiveness or what some symbolically call grace.

**#3:** Probably no need to ask the impact of following or not-following a leading—I suspect most will weave this impact into their tale. In any case, this can be a follow-up question.

**Brief discussion:** how does it impact us to hear these stories?

Challenge participants to begin weaving course themes into their recounting of their leading-win and leading-fails.

(20 minutes, because of the complex question, 35 total)

Opening question: (15 minutes)

(Assuming everyone present is quite familiar with Quakers):

If someone off the street who only knew a little about Quakerism asked you, “How do you know when you have a leading to speak in meeting?” how would you answer? This needs to be a snappy but honest response; don’t let their eyes glaze over.

**The facilitator answers this question last.**

(15 minutes for discussion, 50 total)

Psychological quotes and discussion: (50 minutes)

See [Readings: Part 3](#)

What parts spoke to you? What inspired, surprised, displeased you about these quotes?

(50 minutes, 1 hour 40 total)

Closing: (10 minutes)

**Homework:**

How do leadings manifest themselves psychologically? If we were forced to look *only* at emotional, mental, and physical responses for signs of leadings, what do we see and would we be missing? If leadings are always different then how do we recognize it as a leading? Is this exercise unpleasant, and if so, why?

Check-out:

How was this session? What was stimulating, challenging, exciting, scary?

(10 minutes, 1 hour 50 total)

Close with silence

(5 minutes)

(115 minutes)

## Session 4: Leadings vs. Tradition ..... pp. 15

### CONTENT:

We open with silence (5 minutes)

Check-in (5 minutes)

Review the ground rules (1 minutes)

The movement of spirit in our lives (14 minutes)

Opening question (20 minutes)

Readings and reaction (50 minutes)

Closing (homework, check-out) (15 minutes)

We close with silence (5 minutes)

(120 minutes)

Silence (5 minutes)

Check-in (5 minutes, 10 total)

Review the ground rules (1 minutes, 11)

The movement of spirit in our lives: (14 minutes, 25)

**Homework.** How do leadings manifest themselves psychologically? If we were forced to look *only* at emotional, mental, and physical responses for signs of leadings, what do we see and would we be missing? If leadings are always different then how do we recognize it as a leading? Is this exercise unpleasant, and if so, why?

**Facilitator: tell the first story.** This models for everyone the length of the story and the emotional vulnerability.

**Note #1:** Expect this exercise to be unpleasant. Part of the problem is that this profanizes leadings; it removes their holy and mysterious character. People will likely say that no two leadings are alike, which is true. But how do we recognize a leading then? There must be similarities, but what are they? I suggest it is our unity as a human being, physiological, emotional, unconscious, and conscious mind, and our rationality that in unity recognizes a leading. That is why leadings are ineffable. But part of the problem is that psychological and mental signs don't make a leading—it is the larger constellation.

**Brief discussion:** how does it impact us to hear these stories?

Challenge participants to begin weaving course themes into their stories.

(15 minutes, 25 total)

Opening question: (20 minutes)

(Assuming everyone present is quite familiar with Quakers):

A friend relayed a story where a woman asked him two questions about Quakers. I'll relate them in order, so we'll go around twice. Remember, don't let anyone's eyes glaze over; this response needs to be snappy.

(Put someone on the spot before asking):

Question 1: Imagine if someone not very familiar with Quakers asked you, "Ah, you're Quaker? Ok, what are your traditions?" how would you respond?

Question 2: "Ah, Quakerism is a feel-good religion, then?"

**The facilitator answers this question last.**

(20 minutes, 45 total)

Leading as symbol: (50 minutes)

See [Readings: Part 4](#)

What parts spoke to you? What inspired, surprised, displeased you about these quotes?

(50 minutes, 1h35 total)

Closing: (15 minutes)

**Homework:**

The homework for this session focuses on the relationship between leadings on the one hand and culture and tradition on the other. This is the question of whether leadings are aligned with tradition or somehow beyond or contrary to tradition. Keep in mind that real cultures are far from monolithic—they have competing tendencies and even contradictions. So the homework this week is to observe two leadings—either from this week or anytime in the past—and name a way that those leadings contradict a tradition and a way the leading aligns with a tradition. One leading may do both.

Check-out:

How was this session? What was stimulating, challenging, exciting, scary?

(15 minutes, 1h50 total)

Close with silence

(5 minutes, 1h55)

## **Session 5: Conclusion: Toward a Symbol of Leadings ..... pp. 18**

### CONTENT:

We open with silence (5 minutes)

Check-in (5 minutes)

Review the ground rules (5 minutes)

The movement of spirit in our lives (15 minutes)

Opening question (15 minutes)

Readings and reaction (50 minutes)

Closing (homework, check-out) (15 minutes)

We close with silence (5 minutes)

(115 minutes)

Silence (5 minutes)

Check-in (5 minutes, 10 total)

Review the ground rules (5 minutes, 15)

The movement of spirit in our lives: (15 minutes, 30)

**Homework.** The homework for this session focuses on the relationship between leadings on the one hand and culture and tradition on the other. This is the question of whether leadings are aligned with tradition or somehow beyond or contrary to tradition. Keep in mind that real cultures are far from monolithic—they have competing tendencies and even contradictions. So the homework this week is to observe two leadings—either from this week or anytime in the past—and name a way that those leadings contradict a tradition and a way the leading aligns with a tradition. One leading may do both.

**Facilitator:** tell the first story. This models for everyone the length of the story and the emotional vulnerability.

**Brief discussion:** how does it impact us to hear these stories?

Challenge participants to begin weaving course themes into their stories.

(15 minutes, 30 total)

Opening question: (15 minutes)

(Assuming everyone present is quite familiar with Quakers):

If someone asked you “what are leadings symbolic of?” how would you respond? (Hint: I assume when you talk about a leading, you’re not suggesting that God literally “talking to us” or



literally taking our hand and tugging us in a particular direction, right?) Don't let anyone's eyes glaze over; this response needs to be snappy.

**The facilitator answers this question last.**

(15 minutes, 45 total)

Leading as symbol: (60 minutes)

See [Readings: Part 5](#)

What parts spoke to you? What inspired, surprised, displeased you about these quotes?

(50 minutes, 1h35 total)

Closing: (15 minutes)

**Homework (meeting another time to discuss is optional):**

I've been suggesting that in some cases leadings aren't a command to external action. Rather, the image of being commanded to action is, in some cases, a chance to align our hearts with love. In other cases, the action remains very important. What happens when we view leadings as about love first and action second? What do we like or dislike about this? How does it change our relationship with the Spirit to view leadings in this way?

**Ask if there are things we want to talk about next week?**

Check-out:

How was this session? What was stimulating, challenging, exciting, scary?

Shall we meet a fifth time just to tell stories?

(15 minutes, 1h50 total)

Close with silence

(5 minutes, 1h55)

## Session 6: Story-time and celebration ..... pp. 20

### CONTENT:

We open with silence (5 minutes)

Check-in (5 minutes)

The movement of spirit in our lives (15 minutes)

Open discussion (60 minutes)

Closing (homework, check-out) (30 minutes)

We close with silence (5 minutes)

(110 minutes)

Silence (5 minutes)

Check-in (5 minutes, 10 total)

The movement of spirit in our lives: (15 minutes, 25)

**Homework in advance of session 6.** I've been suggesting that in some cases leadings aren't a command to external action. Rather, the image of being commanded to action is, in some cases, a chance to align our hearts with love. In other cases, the action remains very important. What happens when we view leadings as about love first and action second? What do we like or dislike about this? How does it change our relationship with the Spirit to view leadings in this way?

**Facilitator:** tell the first story. This models for everyone the length of the story and the emotional vulnerability.

**Brief discussion:** how does it impact us to hear these stories?

Challenge participants to begin weaving course themes into their stories.

(15 minutes, 25 total)

**Open discussion** (60 minutes, 1h25 total)

Thoughts, reflections, stories, experiences, silliness welcome. This is a moment to celebrate the connections we've built through this course, any way that we've inspired each other, and to celebrate our national and local community of Quakers across Canada and the Light in everyone in the world.

The course has moved quickly and perhaps this has been occasionally frustrating. Inspiring topics arose yet we moved on. Now is the time to take the best of the best of these moments, and an opportunity to discuss them.

No readings or opening questions is assigned for this session. Reviewing readings is encouraged.

**Facilitator: Structure for final discussion**

So the task here, as “clerk” is to figure out a process for how to focus the discussion.

Note: this is an opportunity to find a group leading about what to discuss. In other words, in deciding what to talk about, we are putting into practice course themes.

**Suggestion:** Begin by reading out the goals we set for ourselves for the course (including the facilitator), which was covered at the beginning, when asking what everyone was hoping to get out of the course. One question is how much those goals have been achieved. If not, then perhaps that is one way to focus the discussion.

**Suggestion 2:** Go around and ask if people have subjects they’re interested in discussing. (Facilitator participates last).

**Suggestion 3:** We don’t need to all decide on one topic.

**Suggestion 4:** If one topic emerges, ask if participants have a question they’d like to hear from others about? Probably be less strict about speaking order etc. Just make sure everyone has a chance.

Closing question (post-test): (30 minutes total)

If someone off the street who only knew a little about Quakerism asked you, “What *is* a leading?” how would you respond now that we’ve had this course together? Remember, don’t let their eyes glaze over: this needs to be a snappy but honest response. (Give time for go arounds)

Note: This is the post-test to the pre-test we did at the beginning, to measure the growth in knowledge and confidence. The answers will be different than the original opening question, and that is good!

(15 minutes because people will discuss how this understanding evolved)

Big check-out (combine these questions):

The normal question: how was today’s session? How are you feeling relative to when you checked in, are you leaving with any intentions?

**Facilitator note:** Participants will likely have many opportunities to reflect on the course, things you could have done better, etc.

*Question 1)* Invite them to use this time to have them express how other participants have enriched their lives. Go first, and set an example by addressing each person by name and saying ways that person has touched your life.

*Question 2)* Do you leave this course with any intentions? If this is an important conversation, and if the conversation is not over, how might we keep this conversation going?

*Question 3)* What are the main things you're taking away from this course?

Remind them that all this material is available online and that they can give this entire course to their meeting. They know everything they need to know in order to do this or another course, financed by CYM's Education and Outreach committee.