"Treeing" Together
Lessons for First Days at Home

Speaking with a Friend about meeting programs for children and how to stay connected in this time, she described her hope that families would find new ways to work on the same things, and be thinking about the same things together. This resonated with me, and the word "tether" came to mind. A tether connects us to a person or place, while allowing us to move and explore. I’m reminded of an image that often comes to me in worship, of a ribbon of light connecting each us to each another.

There are activities here both for home and also to gather us in a shared purpose or project together with friends in our meeting. Friends of any age can participate individually and also be invited into co-creation. (Sounds a little like worship, too!)

We share heart space, even when we’re apart.

Melinda Wenner Bradley, April 2020

Materials:

• Tree pages copied from "Kids’ Seasonal Mandalas" by by Johannes Rosengarten and Arena Verlag (2005). These can be sent ahead of time by email or post.

• Children’s book “The Forever Tree” by Tereasa Surratt and Donna Lukas (2018) *can also be viewed on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKnUHiD71V8

Gathering at Home and on Zoom
You can do most of this “lesson” at home as a family spiritual exploration. If you are able to gather with others online, consider that Britain Yearly Meeting has created excellent advice and guidelines for virtual children’s lessons: “A Simple Guide for Online Children’s Meeting” on the Woodbrooke website.
Welcome
• Greet each of the children by name, and start with a heart sharing, asking each child to listen for a word to share their presentness. “What is on your heart/what are you feeling this morning?” (see heart sharing directions below — it’s probably best to unmute everyone on Zoom for this quick sharing!)

Tree Body Prayer
• We can use our bodies like a tree to pray —
  ✨ reaching down like the roots into the ground, to feel connected to the earth
  ✨ reaching up like the branches to the sky, like the times we need to ask for help
  ✨ reaching out to feel the sun and rain, saying thank you for gifts that help us grow
  ✨ reaching toward our center, remembering that God is as close as the air we breathe

Sharing a Story
• Read aloud "The Forever Tree" or use the YouTube video of the book being read
• Ask children: “I wonder what part of the story you liked best?” and take time to wait and listen to responses together. It’s OK if there aren’t any sharings out loud, too. We’re still wondering.

*The book has lovely pictures with diverse people gathering and playing together outside in multigenerational community, which feel like hopeful images and reminders to hold up for children in this time of isolation from peers, distancing from older family and friends, and closed playgrounds.

Having Care of a Tree
Explain that for the next _____ weeks, everyone is encouraged to choose a tree in their yard (or neighborhood) that they will “have care of.” When Friends talk about “having care of” something, we are both taking care of what is needed and holding it in the Light. The Friend who has “care of meeting” when we gather might pray for us as we worship together, and they greet everyone and lead announcements at rise of meeting.

Some ideas for “having care of” a tree:
  ✨ pick up old leaves and weed around it
  ✨ plant seeds or flowers under it
  ✨ hang things (gently!) from branches -- notes, ribbons, other natural objects like a shell
  ✨ sit under it and read
  ✨ read or sing to the tree
  ✨ draw or paint pictures of the tree -- what changes over time? can you show changes in pictures you make or photos you take?
  ✨ write a poem or a story about the tree
  ✨ do the tree body prayer next to your tree
  ✨ what else can the children come up with?
Closing

• Share the date to come back together! If you use Zoom, plan to show each other artwork and photos on screen, or ask families to scan/email/send the artwork in the mail to you. Either way, collect their work before or after you next meet to create a collage of images you can send back to families and share with the meeting.

• If you sent the tree coloring mandalas ahead of time to families, invite children to use them during worship that day, or anytime — perhaps under their tree! The attached “Tree Breath Meditation” could also be sent to families before you gather again.

Welcome

• Greet each of the children, and sing together: “My Roots Go Down”
  Lyrics can be shared in the chat box on Zoom, and you can also create and use hand motions and body movements for each of the verses. The song is beautifully sung by Annie Patterson at this link, if you need accompaniment! [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZJfRunmd8c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZJfRunmd8c)

  My roots go down, down to the earth. x3
  I am a willow bending in the wind. (3x)
  I am a waterfall skippin’ home. (3x)
  I am an acorn waiting to be born. (3x)
  I am an oak tree tall and bold. (3x)
  My roots go down, down into the earth. (3x)

Sharing

• Children share about the trees that have had care of, and show anything they have made. This will take most of the time — enjoy and celebrate!

Closing

• Thank the children for their good care of the trees, and invite the group to hear a Native American prayer of thanks for the earth and its gifts, before closing with a moment of silence.

  An Iroquois Prayer of Thanksgiving
  We return thanks to our mother, the Earth, which sustains us.
  We return thanks to the rivers, which supply us with water.
  We return thanks to the herbs, which give medicines to cure diseases.
  We return thanks to the corn, and to her sisters, the beans and squashes, which give us life.
  We return thanks to the wind, which blows away diseases.
  We return thanks to the moon and stars, which give us their light when the sun is gone.
  We return thanks to the sun, which looks kindly upon the Earth.
  Lastly, we return thanks to the great Spirit, in whom is embodied all goodness, and who directs all things for the good of its children.
Heart~Sharing

is a variation on worship-sharing that invites participants to respond to a query with the immediate impulse of the heart in a single word or sentence. This discipline allows Friends of all ages to participate equally and richly.

Description of the process:

✔️ After settling into a worshipful space, a query will be shared out loud.
✔️ Upon hearing the query, Friends are invited to share the response that is lying right on their hearts. There is a deliberate bypass of the thinking, cogitating and reflecting that adults often engage in with worship sharing to get at the simple, reflexive heart of the response.
✔️ There is not a limit to the number of times each Friend shares—but responses must be only 1 sentence, or even 1 word.
✔️ Listen and let others’ responses fall into your heart.

Notes for adults:

✔️ **Hint:** Tap into kids’ ability to immediately be in the Spirit. They don’t separate worship-time from play-time from work-time – it’s all the same to them. This means they can get there right away – follow them.

✔️ **Hint:** When you limit your response to one sentence that is immediately present to you, you bypass cognitive sensors and your regular old way of thinking. You also are forced to state only the essence of your response – this is a good thing!

✔️ **Hint:** When you share in the typical adult way with all the nuances and ramifications and details you a) lose the children and b) set a standard that kids can’t hope to meet.

Further notes for the Shepherd of Heart~Sharing

✔️ This form of worship sharing often needs more than 1 query to fill the time with a satisfactory experience. When it feels to the shepherd that the query has done its work, share another one.

✔️ It can be nice to invite the participants to share a 3rd or 4th query if there is time and they are interested.
Heart-Sharing Queries:

Below is a list of queries that work well with Heart-Sharing. These are meant as get-you-started suggestions, and of course are not an exhaustive list!

- What is the most important thing?
- What is a Quaker?
- What is it that God wants for us?
- What gives you joy and makes your heart sing?
- What helps you be centered in Quaker worship?
- What gets in the way of you being centered in worship?
- What is a powerful name for God for you?
- When does God shine through you the most easily?
- When is it hardest for you to notice God in your life and in yourself?
- What is your ministry – the way you share your beautiful gifts with God and the world?
Tree Breath Meditation

*Sit on an arm chair in a quiet place; forearms rest on arm rests, back resting on backrest, feet side by side resting on the floor and bottom resting comfortably on the seat. Close your eyes and breathe in and out. Allow breath and body to slow and relax.*

Imagine that you are sitting beneath a large and great tree on a warm day. There is soft breeze rustling the canopy of leaves above you. There is lush green grass under your feet and extending as far as the eye can see. A small creek can be seen running alongside a sloping hillside nearby. There are trees and shrubs dotting the landscape both far and near. The sky is a lovely blue padded by fluffy white clouds. In the treetops of some trees nearby birds are occasionally singing.

You bring your attention to your feet resting in the grass, you feel your legs and hips quietly relaxing, your spine is long, and breaths are long and slow.

You are aware of the great and majestic tree behind you rising from the earth with tremendous power. Its grand branches extending above and you are able to sense an energy moving through the branches to endless leaves at their tips. Just as you are breathing in and breathing out, so also is the great tree drawing in heavy air and releasing lighter air; the kind of air you can use to vitalize your entire being with. It as if when you breathe out the tree absorbs all that you no longer need, and as the grand tree releases air you receive it into your lungs and through your whole body.

Your mind and body are vitalized and clarity comes vividly as you breathe. The majestic tree is vitalized by what you release, taking what it needs to grow and energize itself. Just like the great tree you also are revitalized by the air you receive, your body creates energy to grow, to heal to enliven all the functions for your fullest life experience. You and the magnificent tree breathe in and out, in and out.

The breeze whispers its presence as it brushes softly across your checks carrying light air from the many trees and green plants all around you. You are surrounded by all that you need in this moment. You feel alive and fulfilled.

The grand tree and all the other green plant life near and far breathe with you day and night, night and day. You feel peace knowing that wherever you go the green landscapes around you breathes as you do; both you and all plant life are mutually nourished and strengthened by the presence of each other. You know now that no matter what happens in life you can always stay with your breath and feel simultaneously grounded and wondrously free.

You give thanks to this real awareness within. You feel peace knowing you will automatically receive air and give air without any need to think about it. The great tree also has this experience.

It is time now to return to your usual routine of life; it is time to return where you sit on your arm chair. You can be happy in the knowledge that this vision of you sitting beneath the great tree is now yours and it will be with you always. You feel your head, neck and shoulders, your arms resting on the armrests, your back leaning on the backrest. You are aware of your hips sitting on the seat, your legs bent at the knee and feet planted on the ground. You are back in the quiet place where you came to sit. You are about to count down from 5 to 1 and then you are going to open your eyes. Five, four, three, two, one.

Take a moment to stretch after a meditation as you have been still for a time. Invite the children to reflect on their experience.

Source: <meditation.hotforyoga.tv/tree-breath-meditation>