Each of Us Inevitable

Some Keynote Addresses,
Given at
Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns and
Friends General Conference Gatherings,
1977–1993,
Revised, Expanded Edition

**Becky Birtha, Thomas Bodine, Elise Boulding,
John Calvi, Stephen Finn, Ellen Hodge,
Janet Hoffman,
Arlene Kelly, William Kreidler, George Lakey,
Ahavia Lavana, Muriel Bishop Summers,
Elizabeth Watson,
David Wertheimer, and Dwight Wilson**

Edited by Robert Leuze

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"Each of us inevitable,
Each of us limitless—each of us with his
or her right upon the earth,
Each of us allow'd the eternal purports
of the earth,
Each of us here as divinely as any is here."

—Walt Whitman: "Salut au Monde," 11, Leaves of Grass

Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns (FLGBTQC), until recently known as Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (FLGC), is a North American Quaker faith community within the Religious Society of Friends that affirms that of God in all persons—lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, and transsexual. It gathers twice yearly: Midwinter Gathering is held over the long weekend surrounding U.S. President's Day in February and Summer Gathering is held with the larger Friends General Conference Gathering the first week in July. Once known as Friends Committee for Gay Concerns, the group has met since the early 1970s for worship and play, its members drawing sustenance from each other and from the Spirit for their work and life in the world—in the faith that radical inclusion and radical love bring further light to Quaker testimony and life.

Preface to the Internet Edition

The new, revised and expanded edition of *Each of Us Inevitable*—the printed compilation of keynote addresses given by beloved Friends at prior Gatherings of Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (FLGC) and Friends General Conference (FGC)—includes all the talks in the original edition and eight additional keynotes, bringing the total to 19. The added talks were given between 1979 and 1993.

In February 2003, the community united on changing its name to Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns (FLGBTQC). The talks are available as separate Adobe Acrobat PDF files for each author on the FLGBTQC website, <*http://flgbtqc.quaker.org*>.

It is hoped that keynotes given after 1993 also will be published someday; however, the richness of content in these additional already-edited talks suggested moving ahead in the present when the possibility of publication exists.

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It may be helpful for some readers browsing on the internet if I offer here at least brief hints, however inadequate, of that "richness" that lies in specific talks.

Elizabeth Watson (1977: "Each of Us Inevitable") came to help us accept ourselves. Her message is not "love the sinner, not the sin," but, "I love you, and I love you *for* your givenness, not in spite of it." She offers an account of the life story and the healing words of Walt Whitman.

Arlene Kelly (1979: "Estrangement and Reconciliation") brought answers in the form of difficult questions: How can we remain engaged with people who are different? From what do we feel estranged? What has caused hurt and anger within us? Do we see that we come to Gathering both as oppressor and oppressed? Can we find ways to step into the shoes of the other person? What is involved in being "reconciled"?

Janet Hoffman (1982: "Eros and the Life of the Spirit") spoke on themes of exploring and wrestling with new insights; fiery passion; relinquishing our need; and transformation. Eros, she believes, drives us toward God and gives our life its basic meaning. Love demands a complete inner transformation. Love (not guilt) leads to social change.

Dwight Wilson (1984: "Nurturing Our Relationships within an Often Hostile Community") spoke from his personal experience as a black man. His message was concerned with trusting one's own perceptions and understanding—not society's mainstream view, not scripture, not the internalized hatred that society may try to induce in us. He spoke of the sometimes negative role of the institutional church for blacks, women, pacifism, gays, and lesbians.

Arlene Kelly (1984: "Nurturing Friendship and Lover Relationships") sees "coming out" as a step toward taking responsibility for ourselves as individuals. In our friendship and lover relationships, are we feeling defective, she questions; have we relinquished some of our power? She discusses ten factors essential to building relationships that are whole.

Elizabeth Watson (1985: "On Wholeness") recognizes our patriarchal, hierarchal, and homophobic civilization and religious heritage. She discusses the Christian church and Jesus; the power of the human community; "dwelling in possibility," and her personal odyssey into wholeness. Can we take charge of life and healing by imaging a desired outcome?

Elise Boulding (1986: "The Challenge of Nonconformity") acknowledges the need to bond across differences—because we need others to make us whole—and the fact that it's more difficult for those called to "nonconforming witnesses." For "publicly gay" persons, special strengths are needed; they are the social change activists. The "gay witness," she says, includes equality, nonviolence, community, and simplicity; gays should be viewed not as embattled victims but as co-workers in reweaving the social web for us all.

Thomas R. Bodine (1987: "Caring Matters Most"), drawing on his own experience, began with a description of the wide diversity of Friends throughout the world. How to change people? How to bridge the differences? he wondered. What happens if we seriously try to practice Christian "gifts of the spirit" in those parts of the Quaker world that hate homosexuality?

Janet Hoffman (Friends General Conference, 1987: "To Listen, To Minister, To Witness"). Her wide-ranging talk includes: living "without seatbelts"; following a corporate leading, not censoring it; "dis-illusionment"—a good thing ("Offend me!" she declares); to minister—sometimes just by being oneself; to love someone—to become in some sense the person we love; to witness—to be faithful to the spirit. She touches on personal growth, the true evangelist, continuing revelation, seeking, stages of development in pacifism, and committed unions.

David Wertheimer (1988: "Bias-Related Violence, Gay Marriage, and a Journey Out of the Society of Friends") shares some personal, Quaker-related experiences: seeking marriage with his (male) partner under the care of his meeting; studying and later teaching at Quaker schools; enrolling as a Quaker in divinity school. He asks whether Quakerism works well only when it can function one step removed from the harsh realities that it contemplates. He sees FLGC as a committee on sufferings, a critical group to helping Quakerism discover how to survive. Death threats led him to question his Quaker belief in nonviolence. His talk includes input from those present at Gathering.

Ahavia Lavana (1988: "Helping and Healing"). When Ahavia's son Hunter had AIDS and later died of it, what helped and what did not help? What was healing and what was not? She speaks on accepting what is beyond our control.

Bill Kreidler's address (1989: "Tending the Fire") is his intensely personal but often humorous account of learning to tend his spiritual flame following an addictive, abusive relationship—by being honest, by being open, by practicing, and by being easy with himself. He talks of the ministry of our community and of how it helped him reach the goal he had envisioned ("old Quaker ladies" tap dancing).

Ellen Hodge (1989: "Tending the Fire") offers differing images of fire: Kristallnacht, persecution of "witches," a 1963 bomb in a Birmingham church, Vietnam and Cambodian napalm; candlelight vigils for the slain Harvey Milk; the Japanese *Bon* festival. She retells, in modern vernacular, the Biblical story of Moses for its relevance to our situation.

Stephen Finn (1990: "Celebrating *All* Our Being") describes a personal journey, illustrating reasons some people have trouble celebrating their being. He asks, does one feel shameful rather than worthy of experiencing "heaven on earth"? Does one adopt compensatory mechanisms to get through a life without heaven? Does FLGC sometimes serve to shield us from the need to be open about our shame?

Muriel Bishop Summers (1990: "On Living in Integrity") spoke of living with integrity—the quality of one's relationship with all of creation—and with oneself: a process. She discusses the balance between integrity and safety; the need of being whole, not fragmented; some essentials for wholeness; and the Divine Presence as ultimate reality, whose nature is love and whose character is truth.

John Calvi (Friends General Conference, 1990: "Laying Down the Weapons 'Round Our Hearts") offers steps to healing: surrendering; inviting one's angels; receiving, with honesty and tenderness, the messages that are sent; entering upon the dance between hope and fear.

Becky Birtha (1991: "'Accept It Gracefully'— Keeping Our Creative Gifts Alive") shares her personal experiences with healing, growing, dealing with pain, and loving herself—often as expressed in her poems.

George Lakey (1991: "Our Bodies, Our Elves") sought a vision of the new creation. He emphasizes, in six general areas, gifts that lesbians, gays, and bi's can give to the Society of Friends and the larger world; the areas are embodiment (in a human body); the erotic (as a bridge to spiritual experience); vulnerability (seen as a doorway); facing pain; reaffirming difference; and love (moving beyond judgmentalism).

Elizabeth Watson (1993: "Night and Day") relates how the titles of some Cole Porter songs evoke reflections from her own life. "Night and Day"—falsely dividing the world (a continuum) into opposites. (Are we the "good guys"?) "Down in the Depths"—unlearning the shame and guilt inspired by our Judeo-Christian tradition. (If there is sin, it is in not caring.) "In the Still of the Night"—embracing the darkness; finding it full of possibility, a time for gestation, for creation, for rest.

—ROBERT LEUZE

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EDITOR ROBERT LEUZE has been involved with gay Quaker groups since 1973, first in New York City where he attended Morningside Meeting and subsequently with the group that evolved to become the present-day Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns. He grew up in rural Northern New York near the eastern end of Lake Ontario, amid the extreme homophobia of the McCarthy period. During his college years at Yale University no one he knew (or knew of) was openly gay. He came out (to himself and two or three others) his senior year and, a year after graduation, moved to New York City. He and his present wife Sarah fell in love in the late 1960s and were married in 1969, believing that psychoanalysis had changed his orientation. He came out for the second time in the mid-1970s, but he and Sarah remain very happily married after 34 years. He pursued a career as an opera singer in the 1970s and 1980s and continues to perform in solo concerts—concerts that usually include songs relevant to the gay experience. He is a longtime member of the Yale Gay and Lesbian Alumni/ae Association (Yale GALA), and of Outmusic, a GLBT organization for singers and songwriters.

Kim Hanson

Robert Leuze

Eros and the Life of the Spirit

Janet Hoffman

Keynote Address, Midwinter Gathering
Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns
Friends Meetinghouse, Washington, D.C.
February 1982 (Revised 1987)

"May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O God my strength and my redeemer."

I feel a lot better than I felt before the meeting for worship; I forgot the strength that is here, and it gives me courage.

The title of this talk is "Eros and the Life of the Spirit."

I intend therefore to put what I call *eros* into the broadest possible context and to talk about its essential place in our spiritual lives. I do not intend to speak to specific issues of sexual morality or social oppression; in my view, it is only when we have truly integrated eros into that Center from which our life's meaning springs that we *can* address more specific sexual concerns. So I take

Two changes in my thoughts since this talk:

1. I no longer would define sex so narrowly. What Rollo May calls sex, I might call lust or something else. I'd also make an effort to unify sex and eros in order to make sex a healthy, holy term, not the negative one May does in his quotation.
2. Rape is not sex or even lust; it really is violence done in the same spirit as hitting someone. It reveals the same need to affirm power over someone; the difference is that in rape the power is affirmed with a different part of the body than the hand.

—J. H. (1987)

these first exploring steps toward dialogue on sexual issues by sharing the transforming power eros has had in my life.

Let me first define what I mean by *eros*, since it differs from the dictionary definition of specifically sexual desire. Let me also ask you to try and use my definition of this and other key terms in order to understand my thinking. I am aware that part of the difficulty in talking about sexual issues is the wide variety of both linguistic and emotional meanings we give to terms relating to the erotic and sexual part of life. I believe eros is a power which originates in the world of the senses, not in the world of the mind. And through exciting our senses, it drives us out of ourselves toward the object or person that stimulated us and makes us perceive ourselves as an intensely alive and unique individual, aware at the same time of our deep connection to the source of stimulation. Eros gives a special power to particular elements in our lives; it makes them vibrate with life for us—sometimes with joy, sometimes with pain, but definitely with *life*. Let me give you an example.

Many people walk, run, and drive along the street where I take my usual run. One day as I ran, I was suddenly struck by the beauty of a certain tree, and that tree took on special life for me from that moment. I feel in harmony now with that tree, feel its life within me—its running sap in spring, its brittle drawing-in in winter. Why that tree? Who knows? That tree is a gift to me; it has special life for me because of my encounter with it. I'm reminded of Emily Dickinson. When someone asked her how she judged something as poetry, she said, "If I feel so cold no fire can warm me and if I feel the top of my head blow off, I know that is poetry." That is rather how I judge when eros strikes me; all of a sudden a particular curve of a building, the smell of wood-smoke curling down a hill, ice crystals floating in a clear stream—these will come alive; the top of my head blows off and I'm cold shuddering with the Life just revealed to me.

Rupert Brooke affirmed this wide conception of eros, too, in a poem he entitled "The Great Lover." He said:

> I have been so great a lover. . . .
> These have I loved:
> White plates and cups, clean-gleaming,
> Ringed with blue lines; and feathery, faery dust;
> Wet roofs beneath the lamp-light; the strong crust
> Of friendly bread; and many-tasting food. . . . the cold
> Graveness of iron; moist black earthen mould;
> Sleep; and high places; footprints in the dew,
> And oaks; and brown horse-chestnuts, glossy-new;
> And new-peeled sticks; and shining pools on grass;
> All these have been my loves. . . .

What is curious is that when eros strikes us, our own uniqueness is affirmed—there is a sense of a particular life between us and the person or thing—and through this affirmation of connection to a particular life, our connectedness to Life in the largest sense is also affirmed. I have a strong sense of this larger Life—it was before we were and will go on after our own death. It is a life which takes many forms—it is in glaciers and mountain streams, in huge dinosaurs and small birds, in the movement of stars and planets, and in us. The Greeks symbolized this by making Eros a demiurge; he participated both in mortality and immortality. He brought Life—an immortal force pulsing through time—to the world through our very mortal senses.

So that is how I define *eros* in "Eros and the Life of the Spirit." Let me now share the overall movement of this talk before getting down to particulars. I believe it is eros which drives us toward God. And once our attention is captured, the dynamic relationship we build with the Divine in us gives our life its basic meaning. I intend to look at Moses in this context to capture the quality of his Divine encounter and its effects on his life. The Divine through eros touches different people in different ways; when we accept the particular way it touches *us* and are in unity with it, we walk in the Light. And as eros drives us toward God, it also drives us toward other people. I will tell the story of the Lindworm in order to explore how we face the chaotic, destructive forces within ourselves and in our relationships with others in order to transform both ourselves and the other. Another story—the rape of Tamar—will illustrate the distinction I see between eros and sex; sex seeks self-gratification, whereas eros desires a constant reaching out. In this process of reaching out, we can transform eros into the compassionate love Jesus' life embodies—*agape*, laying down our lives for our friends. To conclude I will raise questions about the way this compassionate love can be the basis of our concern to transform the world in which we live.

Earlier I have said, "Eros is the power which drives us to God"—which indeed I do believe—but these are actually not my words. They come from no less a person than St. Augustine, a sensual person if there ever was one. St. Teresa knew this, too. "We leap to God through our senses" is how she said it. Listen to Augustine more specifically, talking to God:

> You called and shouted and bursted my deafness.
> You flashed and shone and scattered my blindness.
> You breathed odors and I drew in breath and pant for you.
> I tasted, and hunger and thirst.
> You touched me and I burned for your peace.
> When I shall with my whole soul cleave to you,
> I shall nowhere have sorrow or labor

and my life shall live as wholly full of you.

This is no ethereal, vague God in the sky; this sense of Divine presence is felt, seen, touched, smelled. And that's the way it was in the Old Testament, too. Moses was just wandering along. He *saw* a burning bush and turned aside, and when the Lord saw that Moses turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses!" It is indeed through our senses that the Divine gets our attention.

Once our attention is captured, *dialogue* becomes possible. Moses did not just stop at the bush, listen quietly to God's command, and simply go away and follow that command; he talked back and negotiated with that Voice:

"You want me to talk to the People? Who shall I say sent me?"

"Tell them 'I am who I am' sent you—that Presence which breathes life into everything."

"Are you kidding? They'll never believe *that* name!"

"Well, if they won't believe words, maybe they will believe signs. Take up that rod and throw it on the ground."

"It turned into a snake! Pretty impressive, but the People will think I'm just crazy, throwing rods around that turn into snakes. Can't you send somebody else? I've got my dignity, after all."

"Moses! *Somebody else* didn't step aside to look at this burning bush; *you* were drawn to the bush; *you* go tell them about it."

(Moses knew that to be true, so he tried one last argument.)

"You know I can't talk. You know I have this speech impediment; I just can't talk."

God conceded Moses' point but did not withdraw the call: "All right—you don't have to do the talking. Aaron talks well, so he can speak to the People. But *you* will listen to me and tell Aaron what to say."

This encounter was at the very center of Moses' life; it informed his life and changed its direction. We often hear people say after similar encounters, "I'll never be the same again." No, thank God, we won't. To be touched by the Divine is a gift, and it often attracts our attention in unexpected ways. Moses didn't expect God to appear in a burning bush, and when he turned aside to see a bush and found himself in God's presence, he at first resisted yielding to that Presence. Yet when he did yield, he found his life's deepest integrity—that is indeed a gift.

I think this is what Howard Segars meant when he spoke here last year and said that being gay or lesbian is a gift. He said it was a gift to have to be aware daily of Who You Are. The sense of something within yourself that cannot be fit into the experience of your life's learning of what is acceptable is like Moses' burning bush; and like Moses, once you notice the burning bush and turn aside to see, wrestling is in order. "O God, not *me*. Send somebody else. I can't be that

voice you want me to be." And when the wrestling is over, being that voice brings new insight into the world.

This is not to say that having once yielded to the voice of God, life becomes easy. I imagine Moses' sense of disappointment when he returned to the Israelites after having been on the mountaintop conversing with God in a cloud of brilliance which stayed reflected on his face. Were the people receptive to that Divine light which could draw them together? No. They complained, "Where's the food you promised, Moses? We're getting tired of all this manna." Moses surely wondered, "Was it for a bunch of ungrateful complaining Israelites that I encountered God?"

I believe it is eros which drives us toward God. And once our attention is captured, the dynamic relationship we build with the Divine in us gives our life its basic meaning.

Harold Loukes has the response: "An act of love which fails is just as much a part of the divine life as an act of love which succeeds, for love is measured by its fullness and not by its reception." The important thing is that *we* are aware of the gift of the particular life which has been given to us, not that others share a sense of that gift. Our hope is that as we continue to reach out in divine integrity, others will see how God has touched us and feel united in that Spirit.

So, it is eros which drives us to God, to union with that life behind it all. We know God through our senses, and when we accept the presence of a force so clearly compelling and so "crazy," yet with its own strange "reason" in our lives, we have affirmed the power of eros in a personal way.

I want to move on now from accepting the leadings of eros toward the Divine, an encounter which gives life its basic meaning. I want to explore how we integrate eros into our relationships with other people, and to do this I would like to tell a fairy tale. A word about how I see fairy tales—and this from both my own childhood experience and my reading them to children as an elementary school librarian. There is great richness and complexity within us all which is very difficult to express analytically. Fairy tales express this inner reality metaphorically so that we can see and feel it more clearly. I am aware that fairy tales can be read politically so that the princes are male persons and the princesses are female persons, but I read them differently. I relate the princes to Jung's *animus* and the princesses to his *anima*: they are the male and female elements within us all, no matter what our sexual orientation. Marriage in this sense is the acceptance, the inner union in a balance particular to us of our male and female elements.

And now for the story. I want to note also that it evokes strong feelings; please try to bear with me through to the end of the story and of my comments about it.

The Lindworm

Once upon a time, there were a King and Queen who had no children, though they wanted them very much. The Queen met an old woman who told her to put two drinking cups in the garden at sunset, and "in the morning there will be two roses underneath them, one red and one white. If you eat the red rose, a little boy will be born to you; if you eat the white rose, a little girl will be sent. But whatever you do, you mustn't eat *both* the roses." Well, it happened as the old woman said, and the Queen couldn't decide which rose to eat. She finally chose the white rose, but it was so good that she ate the red one, too.*

Later she became the mother of twins, one a lovely baby boy, and the other a Lindworm, or serpent. "She was terribly frightened when she saw the Lindworm, but he wriggled away out of the room, and nobody seemed to have seen him but herself; so that she thought it must have been a dream."

Many years later it was time for the lovely prince to find a wife, but his road was blocked in all four directions by the Lindworm, "enough to frighten the bravest. He lay in the middle of the road with a great wide open mouth and cried, 'A bride for me before a bride for you.'"

The Queen had to admit that the Lindworm was right, that since he was the eldest, he should have a bride first. So the King sent to a distant land for a Princess to marry his son (but of course he didn't say which son) and the Princess came and was married to the Lindworm. The next morning the Princess had disappeared. The Lindworm lay sleeping all alone, and it was quite plain that he had eaten her.

This happened a second time, and then the King asked his old shepherd to give him *his* daughter to marry the Lindworm, for he couldn't afford to anger any more Kings by having the Lindworm eat their daughters. The old shepherd finally give in, and his daughter was understandably upset. She went into the woods weeping in despair at her fate when she met an old woman who told her what to do: "After the marriage ceremony is over, and when it is time for you to retire to rest, you must ask to be dressed in ten snow-white shifts. And you must then ask for a tub full of lye, and a tub full of fresh milk, and as many whips as a boy can carry in his arms,—and have all these brought into your bedchamber.

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* Quotations in Lindworm story from Joseph Henderson and Maud Oakes, *The Wisdom of the Serpent* (George Braziller, 1986), pp. 167 ff.

Then, when the Lindworm tells you to shed a shift, do you bid him slough a skin. And when all his skins are off, you must dip the whips in the lye and whip him; next you must wash him in the fresh milk; and lastly, you must take him and hold him in your arms, if it's only for a moment."

"Ugh! The last is the worst notion," said the shepherd's daughter, and she shuddered at the thought of holding the cold, slimy, scaly Lindworm.

So the shepherd's daughter married the Lindworm. "And when the feast was over, the bridegroom and bride were conducted to their apartment with music and torches and a great procession. As soon as the door was shut, the Lindworm turned to her and said, 'Fair maiden, shed a shift!' The shepherd's daughter answered him, 'Prince Lindworm, slough a skin!' 'No one has ever dared tell me to do that before!' said he. 'But I command you to do it now!' said she. Then he began to moan and wriggle, and in a few minutes a long snake-skin lay upon the floor beside him. The girl drew off her first shift, and spread it on top of the skin.

"The Lindworm said again to her, 'Fair maiden, shed a shift.'

"The shepherd's daughter answered him, 'Prince Lindworm, slough a skin!'

"'No one has ever dared tell me to do that before,' said he. 'But I command you to do it now,' said she. Then with groans and moans he cast off the second skin, and she covered it with her second shift. The Lindworm said for the third time, 'Fair maiden, shed a shift.' The shepherd's daughter answered him again, 'Prince Lindworm, slough a skin.' 'No one has ever dared tell me to do that before,' said he, and his little eyes rolled furiously. But the girl was not afraid, and once more she commanded him to do as she bade.

"And so this went on until nine Lindworm skins were lying on the floor, each of them covered with a snow-white shift. And there was nothing left of the Lindworm but a huge thick mass, most horrible to see. Then the girl seized the whips, dipped them in lye, and whipped him as hard as ever she could. Next, she bathed him all over in the fresh milk. Lastly, she dragged him onto the bed and put her arms around him. And she fell fast asleep that very moment."

Next morning, everyone was afraid to open the door, but when they did, "they saw the girl, all fresh and rosy, and beside her lay, no Lindworm, but the handsomest prince that anyone could wish to see."

Then there was rejoicing and feasting and merrymaking. "No bride was ever so beloved by a King and Queen as this peasant maid from the

shepherd's cottage. There was no end to their love and their kindness towards her, because, by her sense and her calmness and her courage, she had saved their son, Prince Lindworm."

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Here are my observations on the interior personal level: We all have within us a beautiful prince whose coming to maturity demands he go out and seek a bride—do the expected thing, carry on the kingly line, etc.—and all of this—following social mores for the sake of preserving social stability—is so very rational and external. *But* before this can happen, we need to look at our destructive side that seeks only to find its own pleasure and immediate satisfaction. "A bride for me before a bride for you"—my happiness before anyone else's. Not only do we need to look at this darkness within, we need to wrestle with it. If we look and do nothing ("That's not me"), we get eaten like the princesses, and the destructive side grows stronger. It is through mutual self-revelation ("shift for skin") that wholeness comes—"this is what *I* feel like doing; this is what I will do because of *your* reality." The Light facing the Darkness (the shepherd's daughter facing the Lindworm) has *form* all through the story; the Darkness goes back to a sort of primeval chaos which the Light first whips (opens up) so that it can be nourished (milk), held, and thus transformed. I like this fairy tale because it tries to embody what I'd call a female courage. The "male courage" is outward: going out and slaying dragons, etc. (and God knows there are plenty of dragons that need slaying!). The "female courage" of this story operates behind closed doors; it is the courage to face ourselves internally, to fight those internal dragons who ask for our lives, and to come out alive when the door opens, having transformed our adversary and ourselves.

The "female courage" is the courage to face ourselves internally, to fight those internal dragons who ask for our lives, and to come out alive when the door opens, having transformed our adversary and ourselves.

My observations on the human interaction level, in terms of traditional cultural expectations of male and female behavior: The male, like the Lindworm, is to be big and brassy, expecting vulnerability from the female, her sacrifice to his own nourishment; but he is not to show his own vulnerability. The female is expected to be giving to the point of destruction (the princesses are eaten). In this case, no one comes out whole and the necessary transformation which occurs when one is drawn out of him- or herself to interact with another does not happen. *Two* things happen here of importance. The girl *asked* the Lindworm to be equally vulnerable (shed a skin)—and indeed no one *had* asked him before. *And*

the Lindworm responded. He was *angry*, but he responded. Thus were both transformed—the male changed form and the female in asking for mutuality made possible the transformation of something which could have destroyed her. So must we learn to reveal shift for skin to find wholeness, both within ourselves and in our relationships with others.

The Lindworm story illustrates the complexity of the way eros can strike us; it brings life, but the form in which it first appears is not always as beautiful as the objects Rupert Brooke mentioned in his poem I quoted. Eros is a power, but so is a more specifically physical urge. How can we distinguish them? I'd like to read a long passage from Rollo May in which he tried to define this distinction:

> Sex can be defined fairly adequately in physiological terms as consisting of the building up of bodily tensions and their release. Eros, in contrast, is the experiencing of the personal intentions and meaning of the act. Whereas sex is a rhythm of stimulus and response, eros is a state of being. The pleasure of sex is described by Freud and others as the reduction of tension; in eros, on the contrary, we wish not to be released from the excitement, but rather to hang onto it, to bask in it, and even to increase it. The end toward which sex points is gratification and relaxation, whereas eros is a desiring, longing, a forever reaching out, seeking to expand. . . . Eros is the drive toward union with what we belong to—union with our own possibilities, union with significant other persons in our world in relation to whom we discover our own self-fulfillment.*

Notice that Rollo May here talked not only about union with other persons, which is the context in which we usually think of eros; he spoke also of union with our own possibilities. Remember also that for Augustine and for St. Teresa, the union with what they belonged to was with God.

This seems as good a point as any to repeat some remarks Eric Johnson made in a talk at FGC in 1980 on sexual morality. He talked about things we need to unlearn about sex, and one was "that you have to have sex or else you die or at least get very unhealthy. A lot of people believe that. You have to urinate or you die, you have to defecate or you die, you have to eat and drink or you die. But you don't die if you don't have sex—you don't die if you are celibate." So he was saying that it is possible to lead a life where eros is well-integrated and acknowledged without any specifically sexual activity with another person; eros can be present in a celibate life.

And now back to our story: eros and sex and how to distinguish them. To do this, I'd like to go back to the Bible again and tell the story of the rape of Tamar to explore what Rollo May called "sex" in the quotation I read. Again, I realize this

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* Rollo May, *Love and Will* (Dell, 1973), pp. 73–74.

story elicits strong reactions, but again please bear with me as I try to look one part of reality straight in the eye to learn from it.

Second Samuel 13 tells of Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom, one of David's sons. Amnon, Absalom's half-brother, loved Tamar—or rather desired her so much that he made himself ill over it, "for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her." Amnon had a friend Jonadab, "a very crafty man," who suggested a plan whereby Amnon could get what he wanted. Amnon pretended to be ill and asked David to send Tamar to prepare cakes for him "that I might eat from her hand." David sent Tamar, who baked the cakes, but Amnon refused to eat until everyone left his chamber. When he was alone with Tamar, he asked her to bring the cakes into his chamber.

> But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." She answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this wanton folly. As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the wanton fools of Israel. Now, therefore, I pray you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you." But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her, and lay with her.
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> Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred; so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Arise, be gone." But she said to him, "No, brother; for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other which you did to me." But he would not listen to her. He called the young man who served him and said, "Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her."

This, of course, is sex: gratification of desire alone; and the truth that knocked me between the eyes when I read this story was that Amnon wasn't even gratified. He got what he thought he wanted and then hated Tamar—the desired object—because he didn't feel the way he'd expected to feel. In fact, the hatred directed at Tamar may really have been hatred directed at himself; the only thing revealed by his forcing himself dishonestly on a sister who trusted him was the selfishness of his own desire. How often we desire to destroy those who reveal unpleasant truths to us, especially when they concern the dark side of our own inner life which *we* are unwilling to face.

Tamar was eloquent in her attempts to make Amnon *see* her—shift for skin—but Amnon was so intent on his own desire that he refused real interaction. His unwillingness to do this, to see or feel the condition of Tamar, led to both her destruction and his own. Tamar went weeping to her brother Absalom, who was furious with Amnon and urged David the king to take action against

the son who had violated his half-sister. David avoided taking action, so that finally Absalom killed Amnon himself and then fled.

Why did Amnon act as he did? At the point he felt desire, he had a so-called friend who did not ask any searching questions. Jonadab didn't say, "Look what you're thinking of doing; see how your own gratification comes at great cost to someone else." Like our ad-men today, he said, "Grab for all the gusto you can get. You *deserve* it."

And lest we feel self-righteous about our not being Amnon and have contempt for him, let us see that of Amnon in ourselves as well. How many of us have *never* violated someone else, have never pushed another person to satisfy our own desires without seeing what suffering that caused them? I know I have, and some of those occasions still give me pain.

So with Amnon we see a situation where the initial erotic impulse is seen to be only sexual and leads to destruction. It is also a situation where there is no genuine encounter, no wrestling. In contrast, eros, in bringing life to our human relationships, often makes us struggle, makes us seek constantly how to *act* in a way which keeps life flowing.

Eros has no verb form in English; we can't "erot." We have the noun *eros* and the adjective *erotic* but the related verb is *love*, a word with multiple levels of meaning. Eros can be an object; we can *feel* eros, but when we *act* on it, we need another word; we can transform eros into loving action. To love, in fact, was Jesus' final commandment to his disciples: "Love one another as I have loved you." For him, this meant finally laying down his life for his friends, which he said was the greatest love. Let me say quickly that laying down our lives for our friends does *not* mean being a doormat; it does not mean doing what others want us to do for their sakes. "If you loved me, you'd do what *I* want." That's what the princesses did with the Lindworm, and they were eaten. What Jesus meant by laying down our lives for our friends is relinquishing our own need, and acting out of concern for the other. Let me bring back "shift for skin" here, and say that relinquishing our need is done after wrestling; we need a dynamic relationship with our friends to find the most creative way of interacting with each of them. Rollo May was more specific when he said:

> A dynamic, dialectical relationship—I am tempted to call it a balance, but it is not a balance—is a continuous give-and-take in which we assert ourselves, find an answer in the other, then possibly assert too far, sense a "no" in the other, back up but do not give up, shift the participation to a new form, and find the way that is adequate for the wholeness of the other.*

* May, *Love and Will*, p. 146.

Thus we seek our own wholeness and the wholeness of those people whom it has been given us to love in this life. It is a natural step to move from here into a concern for the wholeness of all humanity, so I'd like now to explore my last point: love as the basis for social action. It is Thomas Merton who defines love in this broad sense for me. Once we have been moved by eros toward God and toward significant other people, we become aware of the depth of consciousness necessary for really *knowing* another person and we can move out of ourselves on our own to connect with others on this level—we can use our awakened senses to seek new loves and not only wait for eros to strike us. It is Thomas Merton who defines this compassionate, "reaching out" love for me:

> Love means an interior and spiritual identity with one's [sister or] brother so that [she or] he is not regarded as an "object" to "which" one "does good.". . . Love takes one's neighbor as one's other self and loves . . . with all the immense humility and discretion and reserve and reverence without which no one can presume to enter into the sanctuary of another's subjectivity. . . . Love demands a complete inner transformation—for without this we cannot possibly come to identify ourselves with our [sister or] brother. We have to become, in some sense, the person we love. And this involves a kind of death of our own being, our own self. No matter how hard we try, we resist this death: we fight back with anger, with recriminations, with demands, with ultimatums. We seek any convenient excuse to break off and to give up this difficult task.*

Merton touches here on an element I haven't mentioned: our resistance to change. Yes, we want to be transformed. Yes, we want love to touch us—but *not* if it means this death of self. We want to be transformed, but we don't want to let go of anything. "It is not safe to forget that the Orphic World egg had on one side the face of Eros, and on the other that of Phobus, and no one who has seen either ever forgets."** Fear is the other side of desire. We sense the power of eros; we know in some sense what it would cost us to follow its leading, and we run away in fear. When we are comfortable, who among us would easily *choose* to experience the pain of others less comfortable? Who *wants* to feel the condition of those starving in Africa? of those fearful for their lives in El Salvador? of women who get paid less than men for the same work? of the gay man smashed by an angry homophobe? "I haven't got time for that pain," we say so easily.

So we all tend to resist change. Do we just sit around and feel guilty about that? No; we accept the reality of our fear and our resistance to change and move on anyway. Prayer is a great help in this effort: "O God, here I am, such a

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* Thomas Merton, *Wisdom of the Desert* (New Directions, 1970), p. 18.

** Florida Scott-Maxwell, *The Measure of My Days* (Knopf, 1968), p. 68.

coward; give me courage." It seems to me that acceptance of the total range of our feeling, in fact *frees* us to act. We can waste so much energy trying to *change* our feelings, when if we looked further within we might find creative ways to express them so that we and others might be transformed. A quotation of John Woolman occurs to me here: "To turn all we possess into the channels of universal love becomes the business of our lives." I hope I do not do him a great injustice to include all our feelings as a possession. We do not exactly "possess" our feelings; they are given to us (our special gifts), but we can *own* them as a first step to turning them, as all else we possess, into channels of universal love. Thank God for the eros that drives us out of ourselves and makes us face our feelings and those of others so that turning them into channels of universal love becomes possible.

Finally, I'd like to get more particular about how this universal love works to bring about social change. John Woolman provides a fine example:

> Love was the first motion, and thence a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they might be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them; and it pleased the Lord to make way for my going at a time when the troubles of war were increasing, and when, by reason of much wet weather, travelling was more difficult than usual at that season, I looked upon it as a more favorable opportunity to season my mind, and to bring me into a nearer sympathy with them.*

Woolman first wanted to feel their condition. He didn't have any great plans for going in and saving the Indians; he went to feel what they felt, and he was thankful for the necessity of lying down in the wet rain and for everything else that made him more sensitive to their experience of life. He was also thankful that he went in a period of "increasing troubles of war," so he could *see* how that tension was affecting those Indians he was going to visit. He knew how it affected the Quakers with whom he lived.

For Woolman, *feeling* the condition of others was the first requirement for any social witness or action. Merton, too, emphasized this when he wrote to peace workers about struggling less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. "In the end," he said, "it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything." This has surely been true in my life. I grew up WASP, upwardly mobile, aware of no racism, no sexism: "It is not true, for I have not seen it." (And if I haven't *seen* it, I don't need to *do* anything.) I did wonder a

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* *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, Phillips P. Moulton, editor (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 127–28.

little why two black kids on our senior class trip ate in the bus with a teacher while the rest of us ate in Howard Johnson's in Virginia. Later, when my family and I lived in Alabama, racism became a reality. I entered the lives of those around me with the immense humility and discretion and reserve and reverence Merton talks about—and I was appalled both at the effects of racism on Blacks and on myself. Then I went to work, not for justice in the abstract, but to transform my life and the lives of those I loved. Let me note that it is not easy to root out the seeds of racism in oneself, let alone to find the most effective way of rooting them out of society.

As I get to know many of you, my awareness of another form of oppression is increasing. "Oppression of homosexuals? Not that I can see," I used to say. Then I listened to some of you share your experiences in my own yearly meeting; then I reached out and felt the condition of many of you in a general sense in these midwinter gatherings and in a more particular way through individual friendships. That personal knowledge has a reality more convincing and empowering than the abstract discussions of "gay rights" to which I used to listen with indifference before I opened myself to the gay and lesbian experience. So I do not work for "human rights" in the abstract; I work for people I know, whose condition I deeply *feel*, hoping that individual lives (including mine) and social realities will both change in the process.

At the beginning of this section I spoke of a concern for the wholeness of all humanity as the basis of social action. Some consider guilt as the spur to social action—that I must assume guilt for the acts of my powerful white ancestors in taking land from Indians or enslaving Blacks, etc., etc., and then make retribution. No, I say. I believe guilt separates us, keeps us in old paternalistic social categories, whereas love joins us. If we love each other, we must act in common cause to bring wholeness to all humanity. If one of us hurts, we all hurt. If I sense myself as one part of the body of humanity, I will feel racial and sexual discrimination as a pain in my own foot and will not be able to move until I do something about it. Economic injustice will perhaps be a pain in the arm, and the possessive spirit which leads to war will be a migraine. Within the same body are the healing power of compassionate love, the virtue of "that life and power which takes away the occasion of all wars," and the courage which enables us to feel sickness and move to heal it. There is great complexity of which to be aware in this body of humanity, and in our search to increase our awareness of it, we enlarge both our own Spirit and our sense of God.

"Oppression of homosexuals? Not that I can see," I used to say. Then I listened to some of you share your experiences. . . .

I'd like to conclude by reading the end of T. S. Eliot's *The Four Quartets*. He combines in a few lines many of the themes of this talk: exploring, wrestling, new insight, fiery passion, relinquishing our need, and transformation.

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time. . . .
>
> A condition of complete simplicity
> (Costing not less than everything)
> And all shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well
> When the tongues of flame are infolded
> Into the crowned knot of fire
> And the fire and the rose are one.*

O God, Creator of all life, help us to fashion the flames of the fire you give us into roses and not into ashes.

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* T. S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets* (Harcourt Brace, 1943), p. 39.

To Listen, To Minister, To Witness

Janet Hoffman

Keynote Address
Friends General Conference
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Dear and precious Friend,
We are grateful to be here together.
Help us to feel your loving arms around us.
Help us to be faithful, me to the words that will come through my mouth and others to the ears to hear.
Keep me aware of the sustaining prayers that have helped me all year and that will help me now.

As I was sitting here waiting to be called to speak, I was reminded of a message I gave in my home meeting near Christmas. When I walked into meeting one morning I felt a message come up. It said, "Where are the seat belts? I want to snap myself in. People need a seat belt in this meeting." But it seemed like a crazy message, so I didn't speak it.

Then people began speaking of some of the Advent stories: Zechariah, getting struck dumb because an angel told him his wife Elizabeth would have a baby. He said, "You've gotta be kidding; she's too old." He didn't believe the angel, so his voice was taken away. And there he was, a priest without a voice until Elizabeth had her baby as the angel promised.

Another person spoke of Mary, to whom an angel says, "You're gonna bear a son, the Messiah." She says, "Well, I'm not married yet"; and the angel

responds, "That's no problem to me." *[Laughter]* And Mary's final response is, "Let it be as you say."

At last I was led to speak my seatbelt message because I found myself interpreting these other wonderful messages from the perspective of whether the people in the stories were wearing seat belts or not. I spoke of how Zechariah strapped his on, and Mary was willing to travel without one. On that divine journey you don't need one; you're in God's hands. Luckily, Mary was married to a dreamer, Joseph. When he heard she was pregnant, he was going to repudiate her (which would be to snap on the old seat belt and protect himself from any damage). But then an angel came to Joseph in a dream and said, "Don't repudiate her; you're going to nurture this woman and her child." Believing in dreams, he said, "Okay." Took off his seat belt.

So, here we all are—without our seat belts, I hope.

To listen, to minister, to witness. There's a rhythm to this talk, as I see it: The "to listen" part is inbreathing, the "to minister" part is outbreathing, and the "to witness" is breathing in and out, our whole lives.

To Listen:

One thing that sustains me is knowing that God is always listening, even when we can't talk. I like the way Augustine says it:

> But at the heart of [humans] is the ear of God. Just as our ears hear the bodily voice, so God's ear hears the heart's voice. God hears many of those whose mouths are closed; many others with their loud cries are not heard.

It gives me hope because I'm still learning to pray and haven't been able to articulate very much to God, but God seems to have heard it anyway, and I'm grateful. So we have to listen to God in ourselves. But I'm not going to talk about that in this part. I'm thinking more about listening to each other, and just focusing on that.

When I was asked to give this speech I was asked to speak from my experience, and I found it's very much more difficult to do that than to share ideas. But I'm going to try.

I've learned the most about listening recently during the 1986 sessions of New England Yearly Meeting. One day a group of women came to me as the clerk of New England Yearly Meeting. They wanted to request that yearly meeting direct the program committee to make sure that no speakers used sexist language, referred to God the Father—they made a list of things. So we got together to talk about this. My first response was, "No, we can't do that. Because the essence of Friends is that we listen to what people say, no matter what message is coming through, and then build on that." But I began by sharing with

them the program committee process in choosing speakers and other kinds of ministry.

In the program committee at New England Yearly Meeting that year we had had quite a lengthy discussion of our speakers and of our one musical or dramatic evening. We had decided that the ministry of drama and music was equal to the ministry of speaking, and we affirmed our decision in terms of money and in other ways. Having affirmed this, we then reached clarity on inviting a group called Bright Morning Star to sing for us.

But when one program committee member listened to some of the tapes of Bright Morning Star, she was concerned with one of the songs, thought it was pretty offensive. The song was called "The Terranova High School Song." It's about a high school beauty contest, where, of course, the girls are all out there, with their measurements given. And one young woman at Terranova High School raises her hand and says to the principal, "Tell us the length of your cock." This concerned person felt, "We can't have a song like that at yearly meeting." So in the program committee we reconsidered our invitation to them and labored over whether we would censor the group by asking them not to share some of their message. And we decided that as Friends open to the working of the Spirit, we couldn't do that. Our corporate sense was that we couldn't tell Bright Morning Star not to sing as they were led.

One . . . had a chorus, "Darling, I'm glad that you're gay." In introducing the song one singer had said, "We've gotta learn to say these words, folks! Let's sing it out, let's practice!"

And at yearly meeting 1986, they had sung for us as led, including the Terranova High School Song. It seemed clear from the audience reaction that yearly meeting was moved by Bright Morning Star's message. However, some people on the program committee felt that their worst fears had been realized. *[Laughter]* So we had another program committee meeting that evening—*[more laughter]*—a very moving program committee meeting, where we learned that our initial leading to ask Bright Morning Star had brought us spiritual growth. We heard from someone who was at first offended by that song and then thought, "Why am I not offended by hearing the measurements of women? Why does that seem unoffensive while the measurements of men does?"

Bright Morning Star had also sung several songs with gay and lesbian themes, one of which had a chorus, "Darling, I'm glad that you're gay." In introducing the song one singer had said, "We've gotta learn to say these words, folks! Let's sing it out, let's practice!" And we heard in the program committee that evening about a woman who had dissolved in tears because she had never been able to

say those words to her daughter. She could hardly wait to go home to tell her daughter what she had sung, at New England Yearly Meeting.

The perception of those who had been concerned in the program committee was that we as a yearly meeting weren't ready for Bright Morning Star's message. But since the way we choose speakers in New England is that people rise to the top out of worship, it was clear that we were led to ask this group despite this concern. And during our post-concert program committee meeting, we essentially received an affirmation of this leading. We learned a lot. We learned that our own perception of "what we were ready for" as a yearly meeting was incorrect. Bright Morning Star is a very professional group; if they had felt the bulk of the audience was not responsive, they would have stopped. But we were responsive—they had us with them. And we felt that. And so our meeting of the program committee was very healing—an affirmation of our initial leading to ask them.

So I shared this experience as I spoke to the women who wanted the yearly meeting to proscribe sexist language. What would have happened if we had censored Bright Morning Star's message? What if we had said, "You can't say these things, we aren't ready to hear them?" Many of us would have missed the new insights the concert offered us. Sometimes we don't know what we're ready to hear.

Anyway, the women went on and they said, "But we're so caring of other people. We try to be considerate about what will cause pain to others. It's painful to us to have people speak of God the Father when we don't share our feeling about the Goddess. We don't pray to the Goddess out loud because we know it will offend some people." At that moment something snapped in me and I said, "Well, please offend me. Offend me. *[Laughter]* If the Goddess has meaning for you, show me that. I'll miss something about you if you don't show me how you speak to that Spirit that gives meaning to your life."

Some years after I learned that we hurt people just by being what we are, I learned that we also heal each other just by being what we are.

We need to start offending each other with our own reality. We have to talk. We can't just listen. Sometimes we're thick; we can't hear unless people are saying what they are. It's true, we ought to be able to perceive, to look into people's souls. But we can't always do that. It helps if they talk to us. *[Laughter]*

So, I felt grateful for this insight from these women: To be faithful to the Voice in us, we have to express our own integrity without thinking primarily of what we can and can't say so as not to offend. If what we express is faithful to our truest selves, then we're not going to be shattered by somebody criticizing it. And

we really need to start talking—even for our own sakes, as whole people—so *we* can become more aware of what we believe.

Sometimes we think that it is disillusioning to hear who people are. You know, you have your ideas, and the person in all of his or her reality doesn't turn out to be what you had thought. So it's very disillusioning. Disillusionment in the secular world is seen as a sad thing, and really yucky. But think of what the word says: dis-illusion. In the spiritual sense, we need to get rid of our illusions. Dis-illusionment is a good thing. Until we are dis-illusioned, we can't see very clearly. It's part of a movement toward reality. Jesus was a very disillusioned person. And I have to say for me, for my faith, I want so much to be like Jesus in the world. The way he was just moves me incredibly.

> "We have to become, in some sense, the person we love. And this involves a kind of death of our own being, our own self. No matter how hard we try, we resist this death. . . . We seek any convenient excuse to break off . . . this difficult task."
> —Thomas Merton

How could he stay at that Last Supper table, knowing that Judas was going to betray him? How could he ride on that donkey on Sunday with everybody yelling "Hosanna, Hosanna," knowing that a few days later his best friends wouldn't be with him in his hour of greatest need? They'd all run away, even deny him, like Peter. He knew all that and he still loved them. Maybe it's a truer love, when you love people knowing who they are, accepting them in all of their wonderful courage and their cowardice as well.

There is a paradox here, because we need *not* to hurt each other, if we can. We need to become sensitive to each other so that we can heal some of the wounds which all of us bear. But if that "not hurting" is false, based on hiding who we are, it's not giving very much hope to the Spirit that can work through us.

Besides, sometimes we hurt each other even if we don't try. There's an Emily Dickinson poem I like about the kind of hurt I'm talking about.

> Heavenly Hurt, it gives us—
> We can find no scar,
> But internal difference,
> Where the Meanings, are—
>
> —"There's a certain Slant of light"

That's how we learn. So even if we didn't try, we do hurt each other, just by being who we are—by how we grew up and how life has affected us. Some of us are prosperous, some of us aren't. Some of us have been oppressed more than

others. Some of us are pretty proud of ourselves. Even without trying we hurt each other.

So the listening is not only to the things which are hurtful, but beyond that to the new insight that will come to us.

To Minister:

This leads me to ministry, the outbreathing. Some years after I learned that we hurt people just by being what we are, I learned that we also heal each other just by being what we are. I had tried so hard to be sensitive to people and be healing and do the right thing, and it somehow didn't work. And then someone would tell me, "Oh, just what you are is healing." You know, you're not trying at all; all you're doing is just being yourself, and somebody will say, "Gee, that was very healing to me." You'll say, "What? I wasn't doing anything." *[Laughter]* That's the point, you know. We do heal each other just by being who we are, and that's a comfort, because sometimes we feel helpless to do anything, so it's lucky there's Someone Else working through us.

This ministry section is the hardest section for me. I don't like the term "ministry," and I tried to struggle with my problem with it. My problem with "to minister" is that it has an object. I think of Thoreau. "If I knew someone were coming to do me good, I would run as fast as I could, in the other direction." *[Laughter]*

But then I was reading an old Chinese story with a little boy I work with, and it gave me my image of ministry. There are people sitting around a table that has food on it and everybody has three-foot chopsticks—so they can't feed themselves. And in hell everyone is very unhappy. They are all fighting and quarreling and unhappy because nobody is eating. In heaven, everybody is very happy—because they are all feeding each other—with their three-foot chopsticks. So that's how I think ministry works: There is this incredible feast on the table in front of all of us; we can take it and feed it to other people, while they in turn will feed us. To be nourished we must both give and receive.

Which leads me to one of my favorite quotations. Many of you have heard it before, but I'm still working on learning it, so here it is again. The basis of ministry is love, and Thomas Merton talks about love this way:

> Love means an interior and spiritual identity with one's [sister or] brother so that [she or] he is not regarded as an "object" to "which" one "does good." . . . Love takes one's neighbor as one's other self and loves . . . with all the immense humility and discretion and reserve and reverence without which no one can presume to enter into the sanctuary of another's subjectivity. . . . Love demands a complete inner transformation—for without this we cannot possibly come to identify ourselves with our [sister or] brother. We have to

> become, in some sense, the person we love. And this involves a kind of death of our own being, our own self. No matter how hard we try, we resist this death: we fight back with anger, with recriminations, with demands, with ultimatums. We seek any convenient excuse to break off and to give up this difficult task.*

As I say, I am still working on this myself, because it's very painful to become the person we love. I went south to find out about racism, not thinking I was racist, of course, and I found that I was, as I entered into people there—black and white. And when I came to know people in Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns I had a lot to learn about the pain of being gay or lesbian in a homophobic culture.

It's not so easy once you enter into another person's self, to hold some of the very self-righteous attitudes that you've had your whole life. It is enlarging, though. It's difficult, but it's very rewarding. Because the richness of humanity is an incredible thing. And by entering into other people we enlarge ourselves and our idea of how the spirit can live in so many, many people.

I learned that unless you do stand somewhere, even if it's painful, you can't move. If I hadn't spoken those offensive words, I would not have grown.

Another thing about ministry: It's led. You have to feel a clear leading to something, and be on fire with it. I heard a nun speak about her work this year. She's just a terrific person who has about a seven-year cycle of starting some new project and then taking a year off. Somebody asked her, "Well, don't you burn out? How do you prevent burnout?" She said, "Of course I burn out. When you are on fire with the love of God, you burn out! That's what it's all about! And you burn out so you can be healed. The important thing is to know when you need to be healed." She was urging us not to criticize ourselves when we are burned out. The burnout is the giving part, the healing is the receiving part, and they go together. We need to know, as ministers, when we are burning out—that it's time for us to receive—and that's often harder than the burning out.

The year I became clerk of New England Yearly Meeting, I was sitting in worship that Sunday feeling very apprehensive and thinking how difficult it would be for me. And I felt, right in the middle of my forehead, a burning finger saying, over and over again, *It sears and it heals, it sears and it heals, it sears and it heals.* And it has. That's how love works.

So what might be our ministry as Friends?

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* Thomas Merton, *Wisdom of the Desert* (New Directions, 1970), p.18

First of all, it's based on our experience: our experience of listening to people; listening to what we do, and discerning whether it was faithful or not; listening to ourselves and our friends; and most of all, listening to the Spirit within us. From that experience we bring the good news that there is a divine voice in every single person. It's not that some people have it and others don't. Everybody's got it! And it can be called on. And we can all be part of the process of that Spirit, growing in the world and bringing more love into it, so that our ministry encourages other people to find that Light in themselves.

I'll end these two sections in two ways. I heard Jennifer Kinghorn, who is a lawyer in South Africa and a former clerk of Southern Africa Yearly Meeting. Two things she said moved me very much. She was talking about pollutants to the spiritual life. And the first was paternalism. She said, "Boy, we are so used to ministering, researching, organizing, giving good suggestions! We need to listen, to be receivers. We are so diminished because we can't receive." I felt again how much we want to be healers, but how difficult it is for us to realize when we need to be healed.

And the second one was just, "Boy, you know, we have some terrific news, we have some *good* news. But so often, as Friends, instead of giving good news we give good advice." Which makes the other person feel like—a turkey. You know? Instead of encouraging them.

And the second summary part of this first section—to listen and to minister—is a chant. Once when I was really depressed this year and thought I couldn't do anything, this chant came to me. We'll do it now. You know the tune. But the words are what came through me. We'll do it in two parts. I'll sing it (holding onto Peter Burkholder) *[laughter]*, then both of us will sing it, and then we'll divide.

[Chant in two voices: all assembled:]

> Listen, Listen
> Through our human hearts
> Flows pain, flows joy—
> Lifeblood of love.

Thank you, that's very encouraging.

To Witness:

Thomas Merton again:

> And the deepest level of communication is not communication but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words and beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear [sisters and] brothers, we are already

> one, but we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.
>
> —Speech in Calcutta

What we *are* is our witness. That original unity is that all of us come from the same Life-giving Spirit and can be animated by it always. But to paraphrase the words of Elizabeth Watson at the 1984 FUM Triennial: Some of the forms in which that Life appears on this Earth would not have occurred to us. *[Laughter]* We don't like some of the forms it takes. But we *are* one. And our task is to perceive that Life at the base of it all.

> We . . . have to listen to the people we know to find out . . . what our witness is.

In speaking about witness, there are two cautions about it. One is Parker Palmer's sense of functional atheism. We say we believe that this Life-giving Spirit is *always* at work in the world, in *all* of us. But we behave as if nothing will happen unless we make it happen. It's only us that makes anything happen, and the right things will happen only if we do it. So what do we really believe? Do we really believe that the Spirit is at work in the world?

And the second caution about witness is that it has nothing to do with results. We think if we make a good witness things will all work out. And they will, but not in the way we think. Again, Thomas Merton:

> Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on, essentially an apostolic work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea *[laughter]*, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself. And there too a great deal has to be gone through as gradually you struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. The range tends to narrow down, but it gets much more real. In the end . . . it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything. . . ."

[It's the listening and ministering we were talking about, the perception of persons, that leads to an authentic witness.]

> As for the big results, these are not in your hands or mine, but they can suddenly happen, and we can share in them: but there is no point in building our lives on this personal satisfaction, which may be denied us and which, after all, is not that important.

> . . . You are probably striving to build yourself an identity in your work and your witness. You are using it so to speak to protect yourself against nothingness, annihilation. That is not the right use of your work. All the good that you will do will come not from you, but from the fact that you have allowed yourself, in the obedience of faith, to be used by God's love. Think of this more and gradually you will be free from the need to prove yourself, and you can be more open to the power that will work through you without your knowing it. —Letter to James Forest

The place where I learned this lesson was in 1982, when I was asked to give the keynote at the Midwinter Gathering of Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns in Washington, D.C. I had been working with Young Friends, and I was all excited about this because it was time somebody started talking. I had discovered in my work with Young Friends that there is a need to talk about sex and sexuality among Friends in general—not homosexuality in particular—but in general, the place that eros plays in our lives. So I really was eager to talk about eros and the life of the spirit. And since I had attended this gathering the previous year, I thought, "This is a place where we can talk seriously about eros and sexuality." We seem to be able to talk seriously about where eros is *not* good. We're concerned with child abuse, and we have to tell children when things don't feel good—well, that's true. And get it into the curriculum in schools and First Day schools. My response is always, "Well, where do you explore what to do when it feels good? Where is healthy sexuality being taught in our meetings?" I hadn't found many places among Friends where this exploration was possible, but about FLGC, I thought, "Here's a group of people who has to think about questions of sexuality and how it fits into their lives every day. This will be a nice safe place to talk about it; they'll understand." *[Laughter]*

And I really prepared. I spent two days at Beacon Hill Friends House writing it out (I haven't written out speeches since)—had a clearness committee, because I certainly didn't trust my own perception of what might be offensive to gay and lesbian people. The clearness committee of gay men and lesbians listened to the draft of it and gave me suggestions. So I spoke on "Eros and the Life of the Spirit"—out of worship—and when I sat down, angry messages came out of that worship, and I dissolved in tears. Being normally a self-critical person, I would have expected to hear an inner voice saying, " Oh, you've offended people again, you've said the wrong thing. You can never do anything right." But the only message that came into my head was, "You were faithful. You were faithful. You were faithful." At that moment I knew this was just the beginning of the lessons that I was going to have to learn from that experience.

And I have learned from that experience. It's one of the major events in my spiritual journey. I learned how insensitive I was. I did get what I wanted. I

wanted to start talking about sexual realities. I wanted to see if despite the difficulty of people not even agreeing on the definitions of terms, it would be possible to explore questions of the relationship of eros and Spirit. And I have talked a lot, but not in ways that I expected.

People wrote to me, and I have had dialogues that have greatly enriched my understanding. I have moved way beyond the words I said at that time. But I learned that unless you do stand somewhere, even if it's painful, you can't move. If I hadn't spoken those offensive words, I would not have grown. I think part of the measure of growth for me is that I'm now talking about this experience without crying, because I've talked a lot about it over the years and usually I dissolve in tears.

I wouldn't know all that I do know now about the way that the Spirit works through gay and lesbian people if I hadn't said the hurtful things I said then. And that knowledge came hard—it's hard to enter the life experience of a gay or lesbian person—it's too painful. But it's a great gift that I was forced to enter the pain my words had caused some people. From that place, I understood not only the pain I had caused; I also felt the Spirit that sustains and affirms gay and lesbian people—sustains them not only in the face of hurtful words, but in the face of the hostile rejection of their gifts, which happens all too frequently in their daily lives.

I also learned then that I hadn't quite put myself in the hands of God. I followed a leading, but I didn't test what I had to say against the Spirit. And I didn't remember the following wisdom: A friend and I were talking about evangelism, and he told me, "In true evangelism, the person with the message comes prepared to be changed." I don't think I was prepared to *be* changed. But thank God, I wasn't in my hands, I was in God's hands, and I was changed.

So, what's my hope for Friends' witness? Well, my hope is that it will be a prophetic witness, as it was in its origins—a strong prophetic witness.

This is my third and last quote from Merton:

> . . . [Prophets] in the traditional sense [are] not merely [people] who foretell the future under spiritual inspiration. That is in fact quite accidental. [They are] above all ["witnesses"]. . . . [Prophets] shoulder the "burden" of vision that God lays upon [them]. . . . [P]rophets are those who live in direct submission to the Holy Spirit in order that, by [their] lives, actions, and words, [they] may at all times be a sign of God in [this human] world. —*Disputed Questions*

> . . . To prophesy is not to predict, but to seize upon reality in its moment of highest expectation and tension toward the new. This tension is discovered not in hypnotic elation but in the light of everyday experience. —*Raids on the Unspeakable*

Again, we just have to listen to the people we know to find out what the message is, to find out what our witness is. People didn't believe in Jesus: "He can't be the messiah, we know him. He's Joseph and Mary's son, so it can't be him, you know. When the messiah comes, we won't know where he comes from." And that's what we think: "Oh, we're not going to get enlightenment from the people we live with every day; good heavens, no! It's going be somebody coming from outside that we don't know that's going to give us the truth."

So prophecy is seizing upon "reality in its moment of highest expectation and tension toward the new." That brings up one of my favorite points: reality. It's *reality* we're seizing on, not issues. Third World debt is not an "issue." Racism is not an "issue." Homosexuality is not an "issue." It trivializes them to call them issues. They are realities which have an impact on the lives of people we can know: We can see the effect of all these realities in real human lives. So it's *reality* we are looking at, not issues.

This quotation of Merton's on prophecy is really very much in the Friends' way of continuing revelation. There is more new light always, and we have to look for it. There's always this tension toward the new. Elias Hicks is someone who understood this very well. I'm going to quote him now, explaining why he never responded to requests to write down his sermons until nearly the end of his life.

(I should note that he never wrote anything in preparation for them; he spoke only from the Spirit at the moment, and sometimes it moved him to stay silent.)

> As I am looking forward in faith that greater and greater things will be opened to succeeding generations than I and the people of this generation can bear, this makes me unwilling to leave anything of my experience that might hinder the reception of those new and advanced revelations.
>
> —Elias Hicks, 1823

So he saw writing things down as hindering new insight and new revelation.

Perhaps Hicks sensed that in his lifetime, he was certainly concerned with slavery and its effects, whereas George Fox never was. But Hicks didn't leave advice asking Friends to continue a concern for slavery; he assumed that in another time there would be a different issue—oops, *reality,* to address. *[Laughter]* (Boy, this language is hard to get rid of; it creeps in on you!)

To close I want to give two areas where I see continuing revelation at work among Friends—now. The first area is our understanding of the peace testimony. For the past year in New England, monthly meetings have been trying to explore its meaning. To aid this process, the yearly meeting approved the following query: "If to know God is to do God's will, what is required of us to remain faithful to our peace testimony, as individuals and as the Religious Society of

Friends?" I found that I was really angry about that question, and for largely the reasons that Elias Hicks indicates. Are we faithful to our testimonies? Or are we faithful to God's voice? It smacked of creedalism, to me—that you have "A Testimony" to which you are faithful—because there's always new light. As I read George Fox, I see him encouraging Friends to be faithful to their own Inner Teacher; I wonder if he expected his words to be written down as Unchangeable Testimonies.

So where is continuing revelation at work in our understanding of our peace testimony? Judy Brutz, who, some of you know, has been working on the reality of family violence in the Society of Friends, has been interviewing pacifists to see if there are similar patterns of development in pacifists. Her preliminary results are that there is a development, that most pacifists go through certain stages. First, they are opposed to war. Second, they become interested in the causes of war, and begin to work toward removing those causes. Then they consider relationships in the workplace and in government. Last of all, they relate peace to the family. And of course that's where Judy has been doing her work—in how the peace testimony applies to family life.My contribution toward rethinking our peace testimony, which is usually stated in George Fox's words: "We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever . . . etc."—a nice strong statement—is to read Margaret Fell's version of it. She begins with Judy's second stage and then gets to the first one. Margaret Fell's version is:

> We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love, and unity; it is our desire that others' feet may walk in the same. We do deny and bear our testimony against all strife and wars and contentions. Our weapons are not carnal, but spiritual. Treason, treachery, and false dealings we do utterly deny, and speak the truth in plainness and singleness of heart. —Margaret Fell, 1660

So the way we talk has something to do with it, too. I see us as a Society of Friends that is working along Judy's stages of pacifism, seeking to apply our peace testimony in our families to see if the roots of war are there.

The second place I see continuing revelation at work among Friends is in our struggles with same-gender marriages, which many meetings are addressing now—my own meeting is. I have learned so much in my own meeting and my own quarterly meeting, trying to look at the questions surrounding marriages and discovering they are intricately related to so many other things. I'm discovering that if we touch one corner of a web, it makes the whole web vibrate. Early Friends made the separation between legal marriage and spiritual marriage, because their marriages were not considered legal, yet meetings continued taking unions under their care and considering the couple married. The important promises are made "before God and these our friends," and the state can

have no impact on that. Once we separated the legal from the spiritual—at least at Mount Toby meeting—and started looking at what the law says about who marries and who doesn't and what the penalties are, we saw that it was a much larger question than same-gender marriage.

(A note on language: I used to use the term "same-sex marriage," but then someone labored with me to say that "same-gender" marriage would be more accurate. As Eric Johnson said some years ago in Ithaca: We need to separate genital sex and genitals from sexuality in general. Sex is something that happens up here, in our heads and our emotions, and infuses our whole being; gender is related only to the genitals we are born with. So that's why I use "same-gender marriage," though I hasten to add that I don't claim that as the "correct" term. There are more important questions to be addressed here than debating terminology.)

In our discussions at Mount Toby we discovered that the law has a very narrow definition of who may marry without penalty: heterosexual couples of childbearing age. We discovered there were older people "living together in sin," because if they married, they would lose social security benefits necessary to their financial survival. Disabled people also lose benefits if they marry. It's a painful decision to marry if you're not in the "standard category." We also found heterosexual couples in our meeting who would have wished *not* to have a legal ceremony. They wanted to make a commitment before God, and in their view the state had nothing to do with that.

Given these realities, there are many different threads to weave together into the sense of our monthly, quarterly, or yearly meetings. There are those who want us as Friends to work toward legal rights for all relationships, and there are those who would like us to return to our early witness of considering only spiritual unions and not have anything to do with the law for any relationship. It's all really fascinating. But we are seeking, hard, a lot of us, and we'll see where we come out. I want to affirm how worthy of seeking this area of committed unions is, because so many, many basic questions about our faith as Friends are there.

So, my hope is that we can continue seeking, and that we can continue to be, to have, prophetic witnesses.

When I was first asked to give this talk, the thing that excited me the most was that the title is in infinitives: *to* listen, *to* minister, *to* witness. I thought, "Boy, won't I have a lot of fun, putting those infinitives into tense and mood. That'll be just great." But then it came to me on my retreat this week: "Wait a minute, that's not my job, it's *their* job." *You're* the ones who will put those infinitives into time (tense), and mood.

Will you be an imperative and empower someone else's ministry? "You—minister; you have a gift."

Will it be indicative? "I am listening to you."

Will it be conditional? "If you could pray for me, it would strengthen me as I follow this leading."

There are many possibilities. So I just leave you with that, with those infinitives, to put into your life, the way you are led.

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