

**TRANSCENDENCE
IN THE PURSUIT OF WHOLENESS**

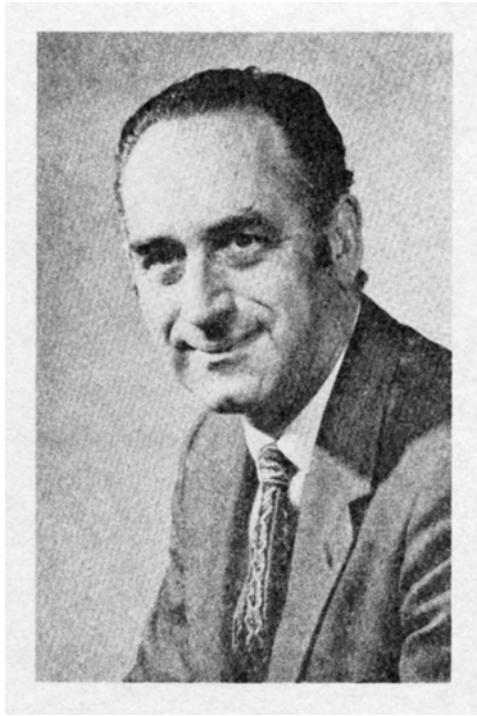
WILLIAM O. BROWN

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WILLIAM O. BROWN

William O. Brown was born and educated in New York City. He did his graduate work in clinical psychology at the University of Colorado, came to Wisconsin in 1954 to open a Child Guidance Clinic and later became a consultant in a pioneer primary prevention program in public health. In Milwaukee he met and married Sandra Topitzes in 1959 and inherited an extensive and loving Greek clan. Bill has travelled widely and his insatiable curiosity has led him to a wide range of interests. He has been a peace and human rights activist since his youth. He coordinated the Turn Toward Peace movement for four years in Milwaukee and during the war in Vietnam was a draft counselor as well as chairing the Milwaukee Peace Action Center. He has long participated in AFSC activities on the program, volunteer, and committee levels. For seven years he fulfilled the function of coordinating clerk at Illinois Yearly Meeting. Presently he looks forward to an early retirement and eventual work with the AFSC, preferably in the Middle East.

TRANSCENDENCE

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I, who often enough need humbling, am truly humbled at the anticipation of giving this eighteenth annual lecture in honor of Jonathan W. Plummer. Were this to be only a talk, I could comfort myself with the awareness that rhetoric and some eloquence have often enough passed for wisdom. However, when this lecture is to be submitted to a scrutiny that the written word permits, I fear it will be concluded that there is something less to this than meets the ear.

But whatever I'm not, I am a life-long taker of risks. My grandmother's insistent voice is forever incorporated: How do you know you can't do it if you haven't tried? So, for better or worse, I'd characteristically rather make a fool of myself than not to venture into situations about which I feel even the greatest tentativeness. I can only trust that I'm God's fool, that from time to time along the way I've been helpful, that along the way the generosity of others has separated my wheat from my chaff.

For more than a quarter of a century I've been a member of the Religious Society of Friends. My first Illinois Yearly Meeting was attended when we were a small enough gathering to know the intimate pleasure of hospitality in local homes. Looking upon this beloved fellowship, I feel a profound sense of gratitude for all that you've been and are to me. I have known wonderful relationships and great affection here. Through all my ups and downs of temperament and willfulness I have known forgiveness and support, kindness and loving confrontation. Some sense of the continuity of my life is anchored here. Joys and sorrows have been shared with many, and not only with those in this room or those who, for one reason or another, could not be with us today. Gratitude and love go out to

other presences, to Lucretia, Clifford, Luella, Edna, Franny, Bob, and so many others who continue to nourish my spirit.¹ Indeed, “death ends a life but not a relationship.”² And so for me, as for so many of you, coming here is coming home. The poet said that “home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” And the poet’s reply to this sardonic appraisal, “I should have called it Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.”³

How difficult it’s been to decide how to communicate what I consider to be important to me or to select from those many reflections I’ve hoped are worth sharing! If only I could speak from my silence to yours or if the speaking could truly come out of the worship. But the struggle continues toward wholeness, toward the merging of feelings with the rational, toward the connecting of passion with reason. Nothing in this struggle is completed and the seeking goes on.

At this time in my life what have I learned from living that may possibly be usefully shared and that may be ultimately comforting? Among other things, I’ve learned and relearned, welcomed and rejected, cursed and respected, celebrated and anguished over the inescapable fact that life is complex and that everything and everyone is somehow connected to everything and everyone else. These are self-evident truths that are denied and evaded widely and stubbornly. A writer noted that it may take a century for a person to discover the meaning of life.⁴ When his mother finally achieved this meaning at 97, she soon lost it in a fit of absentmindedness characteristic of advanced age. As for me, I am happy to say that life continues to exceed my capacity to define it. Life is superbly complicated and people are indescribably complex. It has always been so and each era has its own rationalizations for denial and evasion of that realization.

An educator for whom I have long held regard said this in another way. He tells of having received a letter from a former student in which she said she envied what she perceived as his certainty about life. His reply to her may speak to our condition:

You could not possibly be more mistaken.
The difference between you and me is not

that I have everything figured out. It's that I know I don't and I never will, I don't expect to and I don't need to. I expect to live my entire life about as ignorant and uncertain and confused as I am now, and I have learned to live with this, not to worry about it. I have learned to swim in uncertainty the way a fish swims in water.⁵

We are obliged to act, and to act intelligently, or as intelligently as possible, in a world in which we know very little; in which, even if the experts know more than we do, we have no way of knowing which expert knows the most. We are obliged to live out our lives thinking, acting, judging on the basis of the most fragmentary, uncertain and temporary information.

If we accept this terse appraisal as one large self-evident truth in living, then what enables us to live in that light and life?

For me, direction lies in the core religious experience, in the visions and energies of that which is transcendent or mystic. Nor am I referring to the highs, the mountain tops, or what Abraham Maslow called the "peak experiences." These I have known and for these I am eternally grateful.

What I refer to essentially is the mystic and transcendent in everyday life, that which may be found no further off than just the other side of the commonplace. They may be moments of great calm and normalcy that seem only like a homecoming of the spirit. For me they are primarily what I expectantly await in the Meeting for Worship and what I hope I am ready to embrace wherever I may be.

I am assuming that such transcendence is potentially available to everyone and that what I know most deeply and profoundly is most universal. Doubtless, a scientific-technological age and a time characterized for many by alienation from self, from others and from the world of nature, have made these experiences less realizable for some than the writings of early Friends and other religious persons indicate. But I believe that the longing for transcendence, for a wholeness and a oneness, continues within each of us, however obscured. For me it is a clear manifestation of the Light within.

We are reminded that early Friends took the religious experience out of the context of churches, rituals, dogmas and professional clergy and distributed it in principle throughout the whole of life. It became not a religion of belief and doctrine, but a religion of vision born of transcendent knowledge. Religion became a state of being, achievable in almost any activity of life if this activity is raised to a suitable level of perfection. What the mystic has said to be essential to the individual's religion received empirical support and no longer needed to rely only on tradition, blind faith, temporal power or exhortation. Rather than a secularizing of religion it became a "religionizing of all that is secular."⁶

Much has been written and spoken about mysticism in and out of the Quaker context and I do not intend to speak of it in an expository or nearly comprehensive way. What I want to do is to affirm the mystic by sharing a few of my own experiences in transcendence and to point up what for me has been relevant to these. In this I can only pray that I not out-distance my Guide.

A prototype of transcendence in the mundane took place for me almost two decades ago in an educational research project that had particular significance for my job program. Essentially it was an effort to learn how hospital personnel, particularly in maternity and pediatric services, could be enabled to be more open to innovations that would reduce depersonalization and maximize sensitivity to the patient's complex needs. There was considerable investment in this project and we were under the scrutiny of an inhospitable bureaucracy with which our program was housed. The study was in its third year and we had arrived at the last phase. In the briefest description, my task was to lead a series of experiential group discussions with representative nurses from a number of hospitals in the region under study. These persons had been carefully selected and prepared for the study by a steering committee of nurse educators and practitioners who had participated in a parallel group process two years prior. Coming from the clinical psychology context, I had only begun to learn something of the complexities of an educational group process and I was far from mastery. As the time drew near for this initial session in the hospital setting, I felt the usual tensions even though I was well prepared and had anticipated as much as possible.

The summer morning that I was to drive to the hospital for this first meeting was special, only in my feeling a particular sense of well-being. This was more than just a reshuffling of defenses to avoid anxiety with which I was all too familiar. I was simply unflappable. Driving the approximately forty miles to the project site, I had a heightened awareness of everything in the landscape and nothing seemed to evade my attention. Indeed, “all things were new; and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter.”⁷ When I arrived in the hospital seminar room I was immediately aware of each of the fourteen participants and what their faces and bodies were expressing. As it turned out, only a few were prepared representatives. Most of them had been sent by various supervisors and administrators because they “needed to see a psychologist.” The hospital’s administrators had broken their carefully transacted contracts and were engaging in their traditional authoritarian manipulations. One must admit that all this could be a bit disconcerting, but you will have to take it at face value when I tell you that I was not in the least threatened. The research project was suddenly unimportant. What concerned me deeply and what was communicated clearly was my genuine concern for what was happening to each of these persons, for what it meant to them to have been manipulated and treated in this destructive manner. The tabling of agenda was certainly not novel, but the decision to do so was far less conscious and I felt led by a will other than my own. The two and one-half hour session passed as in a moment, though we dealt with the most complex issues. Not once did I have to monitor my own behavior, as is a rule in an enabling group process. I was wholly present where I was and everyone in the room knew it. A sense of beloved community, however transient, had been realized. There was, at the end, a shared expression of joy and the spontaneous assessment of what had happened had all the earmarks of a religious experience. Need I doubt I was in a state of grace, that this was a truly transcendent event?

How I would like to be able to say that the description of this event consistently characterized my ensuing efforts. The image and criterion were established and, from time to time, there were bits and pieces of experience, more or less protracted, that could be

similarly described. But the gift of grace is just that—a gift—and one cannot make it happen. However, it left me with a clear vision of what, with God’s grace, I could be, and it gave me a sure glimpse of the Kingdom.

Rufus Jones described this when he wrote, “We create, by some higher drive of spirit, visions of a world that ought to be, and these visions make us forever dissatisfied with the world that is, and it is through these visions that we reshape and reconstruct the world that is being made.”⁸ It is these words which, for me, describe the “practical mystic.”

But again, life is complex and my seeming capacity to, with reasonable consistency, enable growth in others, to support being, was not transferred to my own Monthly Meeting with adequate consistency. It is enough to say that I loved the image, the dream of my Meeting, more than the Meeting itself, and this was destructive to Community. I had failed to transcend this limitation.

Much meditative reflection and contemplation has been allowed in the time interval between my exclusion from Meeting and my reentry. The complexities appear enormous for all involved and I have wondered what it would take for a Meeting to be able to “weary out all contention.”⁹ What is it that makes loving confrontation so difficult? Is it because we don’t know what to do with our negative, angry, hateful feelings in the Quaker context?

Are there ways in which we can clear the emotional pathways so that the positive and constructive can find expression? Not only have behavioral studies and a host of therapeutic-educational approaches provided guidelines in this direction, but Friends from the beginning have voiced sensitive concerns nearly imperceptible to major violations of integrity, have eluded each other in the Light, have prayed together for understanding and vision, have held threshing sessions to clear the air, have held open the hope for redemption and transcendence, have tried what love can do and when all else failed, have suffered defeat and separation. If we are to face up to the complexities of who we are and what we are about as a people and not be overwhelmed, then where better to work out the complexities of building community than in this microcosm of our local Meeting?

A dimension much needed in the process of loving confrontation

and in meeting challenges in all their complexity is perhaps a gift like that of grace—the gift of humor. There is a particular kind of Quaker humor that is gentle and dry and we chuckle when we are privy to it. It is a humor that nourishes, that saves the day, that delights and reaches down to some deep, needful core of self. It is a humor that has the universal appeal of holding up the mirror for us to unthreateningly see ourselves and the human condition in wonderful clarity. Thank God for the grace of humor, without which we would be less than human and less aware of the signals of transcendence within ourselves and others.

I recall with deep down warmth and affection my moments in the company of Henry Cadbury during the Friends World Conference at Guilford College. It was the first time I'd come into contact with Evangelical Friends *en masse* and my image of what it was to be a Friend was shaken. Henry Cadbury and I happily stayed in adjoining rooms in the same dormitory and we almost always walked to breakfast together, or to Meeting for Worship or somewhere else on campus. It was easy to overcome any reticence with this friendly, cheerful man and I shared with him my puzzlement concerning the unfamiliar range of Quaker expression. Throughout that week our brief walks together were moments of precious hilarity in which he regaled me with anecdotes of Quaker presumption. He never diminished anyone and his authentic delightful humor enabled me, more than anything else, to be open to the possibilities in this complex coming together of representatives of the various schisms in Quaker history and to the experiences of transcendence inherent in the situation.

A process which touches on the mystic—is perhaps mysticism without metaphysical rationale—is that of psychotherapy. In my work with children who were emotionally distressed and with their families, I have seen healing and a renewed struggle toward wholeness come about through the transforming spiritual powers of love and understanding. The recounting in this phase of my life could be endless, but my teacher, Virginia Axline, has most successfully epitomized the prototype of this experience in her excellent book on the triumph of spirit in the boy *Dibs, In Search of Self*.

Psychotherapy explores those significant parts of life that are

ordinarily not available to us and that are so fundamentally related to the transcendent experience. These are the symbols of dreams and myths, signs and rituals which, in the treatment of children, are all combined in the richly complex activity of play.

In our daily life, adults, with the exception of the religious mystics, poets and other creative artists, are out of touch with much of this unexplored and life-supporting terrain of inner life. Our thinking and communicating is primarily limited to language and familiar symbols and to those non-verbal expressions we are able to extrapolate. The mystic transcends language, thought and experience, is in essence ineffable, and can only be described in our culture-bound language and symbols. However, since it is through language that we ordinarily contemplate and that we communicate with ourselves and others, I want to briefly acknowledge these in their relation to transcendence. The wonderful asset of symbols and language is indescribably complex and loaded with pitfalls. The more closely they reflect and harmonize with the genuine meanings of experience, the more likely will they be to serve constructively rather than hurt, the more likely will they be to clarify rather than obscure and confuse.

Language, complex in itself, can be used to help unravel the complexities of experience and direct or redirect our energies in the pursuit of wholeness. Around the time that I first became involved with a Friends worship group, I was undergoing psychotherapy or personal counseling. Anyone having experienced such a process will know that stubborn defenses are employed to avoid the pain of self-disclosure. My major defense was to intellectualize; that is, to use words skillfully but as detached from a feeling reference as possible. As the therapy moved on, this defense became harder to sustain, and occasional insights would break through revealing that I was being dishonest, that my protests of adequacy were grossly unwarranted. But I simply could not extricate myself from this web of deceit. The closer I came to being in touch with my feelings, the higher mounted the intellectualizations. During one unforgettable hour I was almost literally drowning in a torrent of words declaring that I was on top of things and didn't need help from anyone. My therapist, warm, supportive and down-to-earth, having almost silently endured these

relentless monologues for many months, uttered a mild expletive. It was so perfect in its congruence, its timing, its authentic resonance in me, that I was stunned. Suddenly, after months of this boring scenario, the game was up. It was hide and seek and I was tagged. I dissolved into the most health-giving laughter I'd known in a very long time and acknowledged the absolute validity of the expletive. The therapist was no longer a mere sounding board, or target, or a "thing" to be manipulated for my own needs. He became a person and a dear friend. In the jargon of the trade, I had achieved a "positive transference." It was a turning point and I was able to move one step along the difficult never-ending journey toward self-understanding.

Certainly, I'm not advocating the use of expletives, however mild, which in their promiscuous application have helped to trivialize our language. What I speak to is the redemptive, liberating capacity of words when they are spoken or written in "perfect sincerity." For Friends, such words come most often out of the worshipful silence and, when most perfect, we sense that they are God speaking through us.

Friends have traditionally been scrupulous in the writing of minutes, journals and other documents that clearly express what is intended. Impatience is sometimes voiced with this practice and it can become an exercise in the splitting of hairs. But when the significance of establishing congruence between language and experience is recognized, this practice is wholly supportable.

I want to make a further very brief reference to one way of thinking and speaking that is particularly important and relevant to the transcendent. Our thinking and language abound in dichotomies that deny the complexity of life. It would probably be instructive as well as enjoyable to make a list of dichotomous terms and to try to resolve these by logical argument. How do we explain away to our satisfaction "we-they," "you-me," "knowledge-values," "logic-intuition," "subjective-objective," "sacred-profane," "in here-out there," "male-female" and so on *ad infinitum*? What we may discover is that these dichotomies can only be closed experientially by transcending them. Think, for example, of the dichotomy "in here-out there" in relation to our environment. Aldo Leopold, land ethics pioneer, tells of the destruction of the flora on a mountain by

deer that had been proliferating because ranchers shot the wolves that kept the deer in check. He said that in order to prevent such depredation and to maintain the balance of nature, it is necessary to “think like a mountain.”¹⁰ In the experience of transcendence “in here—out there,” the knower and the known, merge as in the vision of a child.

Jesus spoke of little children as of such of which the Kingdom is made. He also instructed us that we must become as little children if we are to realize the Kingdom. I believe I understand this more holistically than anything else I know. The transcendent is exemplified in the child’s view of the world most explicitly before he or she has been long influenced by the acculturation process.

Most of my work as a psychologist, and prior to my career, has been directly with children or in their behalf, though I have had no children of my own. In approaching a child, I often feel a sense of wonderment, humility and infinite respect. I feel a special reverence for children even though they can sometimes drive me to distraction as they can any other adult. I am not sentimental about children and I can be impatient with their endless testing of the limits. But I’m especially mindful of them and a lot more careful. I learn much from them, particularly when they help me to see the world through their eyes. Above all, they help me to get in touch with the child in myself. I’m not always in touch by a long shot and instead of being childlike, I’m often childish. But I know the difference and that’s important.

A wise person whom I’ve known over the years had this to say about children and the sacredness of childhood:

What children need from grownups is an affirmation of the significance of childhood and there is only one way to give them this: by a genuine acceptance of the child within ourselves, the qualities that make us each special and different, the qualities that we were born-to-become. When we lose our way as adults, it is not because we are not smart, not because we do not know enough

facts, not because we cannot be successful; it is that we have somehow along the way lost touch with who and what we were to begin with.¹¹

Those who attend carefully to children, have a miraculous chance to see again at the child's level. With the child's eyes and the adult's skills in sensation, this can provide a vision of the world as if it had only just been made. We can learn to perceive with the child's natural hospitality toward the world and with their creative astonishment. Beyond this, childlike thinking has the virtue, often lacking in adults, of relevancy to the illogic or non-logic of the world. Of such is the Kingdom.

I cannot leave speaking about the generic meanings of childhood without digressing to express my alarm about the experiences of many children today. If we are to change the disastrous course of history and assist evolution, we will need to carefully seek out the roots of alienation. Children are figuratively and literally being abandoned and exploited across all socio-economic lines. Their priority on the scale of society's values is perilously low despite indications to the contrary. Goethe said that "seed corn must not be ground" and we should take this warning with a sense of imminence. In our homes, Meetings, neighborhoods and anywhere in the world we can exert our influence, we can help to strengthen children through affirming childhood. There is no end to prescriptions for accomplishing this, but, as my theme has implied, it is ultimately by images that we are enabled. Such an image is found in an observation by an educator at A.S. Neill's Summerhill School in England.

Occasionally, very rarely, in a particularly happy family, I have seen little children who have seemed wholly secure, at ease, natural, and happy. But never before this meeting had I seen so many of them in one place, least of all in school. They were joyous, spontaneous, unaffected. I wondered why this should be, and at the party I thought I saw why. More

times than I could count, I would see a little child come up to a big one, and with a word, a gesture or a clutch of the hand claim his or her attention. I never saw one rebuffed, or treated anything but lovingly. The big kids were always picking them up, hugging them, swinging them around, dancing with them, carrying them on their shoulders. For the little children, Summerhill was a world of big people, all of whom could be enjoyed, trusted, and counted on.¹²

Of such also is the Kingdom.

Transcendent knowledge as we know it in Quaker history need not achieve its purity by quietism and withdrawal. As Friends we live in a tradition of mysticism that stems from the Hebrew prophets, and that from the beginning has brought its full visionary powers to bear against the injustices of its time. It is in this spirit that I speak of the American Friends Service Committee which has exemplified for me, as an activist, the Quaker speaking Truth To Power.

Norman Whitney often reminded those of us who were caught up in the strategies of peacemaking that there is a politics of time and a politics of eternity. I found this dichotomy significant for, indeed, there are finite and infinite aspects of time, and long and short range goals must be kept in perspective. We can be responding to the crises that command our attention as well as keeping steady focus on the building of the Kingdom. Recently I've rethought this phrase, the politics of time and eternity, particularly in the context of my long love affair with the American Friends Service Committee.

It is awesome to witness the courage, imagination and tenacity of the AFSC people in their attempts to confront radically the agonizing enormity and complexities of violence and injustice and their related issues. Worthy Friends have written and spoken of the dilemmas and paradoxes experienced by the Service Committee as it struggles with decisions to act or not to act. It is equally awesome to witness their efforts to act with fidelity to the Quaker process. But the complexities of Service Committee issues are those of the

world around us, and their challenges have been such as, among other things, to make the organization expert-dependent. We who are committee members, in particular, sometimes feel like spectators in an arena built hopelessly beyond the scale of ordinary people. What is there left that the non-expert Friend can yet be said to know? Perhaps one useful thing that many Friends may be said to know is that there is actually no dichotomy of time and eternity. This dichotomy has been closed experientially. There is no time but this present, and eternity transcends this time, is incorporated in this present. “It is a way of relating to life and not a succession of tomorrows. Jesus said that ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.’ This may be translated to say that our experience of eternity is in how we relate to any given moment. It is to see voluntarily under the aspect of eternity and to see the sacred and symbolic in and through the individual here and now instance.”¹³

If we live in that light and that life then we will form queries and make priorities accordingly. We will expand our traditional queries which Kenneth Boulding refers to as “loaded questions” to ask ourselves “who we are,” “what we are here for,” “what it is we are meant to do,” “what it is we want to become,” “what prevents us from being this other, better self?” If we are faithful in seeking the answers, the priorities will follow.

The transcendent experience as I’ve described it may be expected to be realized most often in the Meeting for Worship, both privately and shared. I want to tell you about two Meetings, ordinary yet extraordinary, which are recalled with particular warmth.

One First Day morning I was taking a hike into the countryside of Boulder, Colorado. Along the way I met the wife of a university professor with whom I had studied. We greeted each other and I learned that she was walking to a Friend’s worship group nearby. I’d known little of Friends excepting some historical data and something of the work of the American Friends Service Committee. I asked if I might go along and was assured of my welcome. When I entered the student lounge on the campus where the Meeting was held, the twenty or so persons present had already centered down. With utter immediacy I had the clear discovery and recognition that this was where I belonged, this was what I had unconsciously longed for, this

was the shared expression of reverence that I hungered to express. I recall no vocal ministry. A baby gurgled and whimpered on and off throughout the hour without providing the merest distraction. It was all so perfectly congruent and natural that I could only feel a calm expectancy, a pervasive comfort and a sense of gratitude and quiet wonder at it all. I had not thought in such terms in years, but I knew I was in the presence of God because I experienced God. Following the rise of Meeting, there was a brief period of reading from the Journal of John Woolman. Across the centuries Friend Woolman drew me further and irretrievably into the net.

Some in this room will recall a particular Meeting for Worship in the not too distant past. During the days that preceded it, there had been much contention around issues of change. Feelings were bruised and some persons had cause to feel estranged. Toward the end of the hour someone rose from the silence and, acknowledging his failure of love, expressed a longing for reconciliation. Out of the moving silence that followed, came a clear sweet singing of the opening phrase of the Doxology. The entire Meeting was drawn together as one voice in song. We were truly gathered in those moments and a vision of community, a pure sense of what we could be, what God intended us to be, was manifest. How sustaining and motivating such moments are, we may never know.

Friends have been traditionally cautious about the mystic. Some have perhaps found more sober and laborious ways to achieving transcendent knowledge. Inner voices are not always trustworthy and it may be well to consider that our interpretation of them may contain some self-distortion. The ultimate illusion may be that we are free from illusion. I believe we must have confidence in our experience but remain skeptical about the impartiality of our judgment. To be guided by our experience in the Light may require nothing so much as a fundamental humility. Our endless struggle toward wholeness can only be humbling.

I sense sometimes that we are uncomfortable with that word "humility." It may be that we live in a time when hubris is so commonplace that the word is shrunken out of sight and sound. It may be that it touches feelings in us that make us uncomfortable. When it's used as a reminder to us or in reference to someone else,

we often hear the quip “well, he or she has a lot to be humble about.”

A psychologist, who represents the newer and positive force in psychology as a departure from a nihilistic Freudianism and a reductionist Behaviorism, has written an essay on Humility that best articulates my own discovery. I have adapted some of it in bringing this lecture to a close:

Humility is a form of inner strength, a kind of dignity that makes it less necessary for a person to pretend.

We cannot help but be humble when we look beyond the appearances of things and contemplate the vast reaches of the unknown. The more we grow in understanding, the more we realize how much there is that yet lies hidden.

When we seek to realize the meaning of our own emotions, we cannot help but be humble. We are baffled by the play of love and hate in our lives. We cannot penetrate the clouds of anxiety that move across the horizons of our inner world. We are perplexed by conditions that sometimes move us toward depths of longing. We are bewildered by the complexity of our feelings, which lead us at times to accept what we should reject and to reject what by rights we should accept.

We cannot help but be humble when we consider the poignancy of our grief; the weight of our melancholy on occasion; the inexpressible quality of joy that sometimes wells up in us; the ominous waves that threaten to engulf us as we stand on the brink of despair; and the thrill that surges through us as we taste in advance a happy fulfillment of our hopes.

We cannot help but feel humble as we absorb all that we can know, and in so doing glimpse depths we may never fathom and heights we may never scale in the majestic peaks and valleys of our inner life.

When we are humble, we are able to wait and be silent. We can wait, for we do not expect that we should immediately understand each question from within or have a response to each query from without. We can wait, for we do not expect to reach instantaneous insight or to have an instantaneous answer or to offer an immediate competing or echoing remark when others speak. We do not feel guilty about not knowing—at least not always. Nor do we feel guilty

when we are assailed by doubts concerning something we once thought we knew.

Being able to wait enables us to listen. We are good listeners when others have something to say, and we will hear them out if we think it fit or timely to do so. But even more, we are good listeners to our own inner voices which often speak very slowly and indistinctly. If we were not good listeners, we would not give ourselves time to experience the impact of our feelings, to catch the meaning or at least to try to capture the meaning of a nascent mood or a vaguely pleasant and disquieting thought that crosses our minds.

The humble person is willing to accept truth and to seek it wherever it may be found. A humble teacher, for example, will accept a child as one who, in a given situation, may give a clearer and more profound glimpse into the meaning of things than the teacher can. And a humble scholar is one who realizes that when a less learned person is puzzled and asks why, he or she may be more profound than the erudite person who knows the contents of a hundred books but never wonders what his or her erudition means.¹⁴

Oliver Cromwell's message offering peace to the Scots before he had to crush them in battle makes a more succinct plea for humility: "I beseech you, think it possible you may be mistaken."

Indeed, we live in cataclysmic times when "wrong comes up to face us everywhere."¹⁵ The preface to every statement of commitment often carries the implicit note: If the bomb holds off and the environment endures. But commitment we must make if we are to be true to our calling as Friends; commitment we must make if we are to be whole and not be overwhelmed and immobilized by the enormous complexities of our time. When we acquire the knowledge that comes from transcendence and see with the mystic vision of the prophets, we shall realize the ancient promise: We shall mount up with wings as eagles, we shall renew our strength; we shall run and not be weary, we shall walk and not faint. . .

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10. Aldo Leopold: *Sand County Almanac*
11. Eda Le Shan: *The Conspiracy Against Childhood*
12. John Holt in George Dennison's *The Lives of Children*
13. Rollo May: *Man's Search for Himself*
14. Arthur T. Jersild: *When Teachers Face Themselves*
15. Christopher Fry: *A Sleep of Prisoners*

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