

Leadings and Pushings

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Introduction by Frank Young

Franky Day was born in Alton, Illinois and grew up in Toledo, Ohio. After attending the Baldwin School, she entered Bryn Mawr College, graduating with a major in mathematics. She received an M.A. in mathematics from the University of Michigan and (with occasional interruptions) from 1944 until her retirement in 1983, taught mathematics at the University of Illinois at Urbana. She is married to Mahlon Day (also a mathematician) who bears partial responsibility for some of those interruptions.

This past Monday, when the Days and I were talking in their living room, I asked about what I could say here. Mahlon had an immediate suggestion: "Say that Franky has raised six children, five dogs, 17 (or is it 20?) foster children (two of whom were Vietnamese refugees), and one

Chilean refugee family (and very slightly assisted with eight grandchildren)." Mahlon was, of course, smiling broadly as he went through this long list. I would just like to point out that this list says something about the breadth of Franky's concern for and love of her fellow inhabitants of this Earth. Franky is committed to deep and significant personal involvement with others, she has always offered extensive support and hospitality to a large variety of people, she gives of herself in large amounts.

I also have to point out that Mahlon's list is incomplete. He neglected to mention the innumerable people who have experienced the open door, open table, open arms practices of the Day family. Dinner at the Day's is an exciting event. You never know who will drop in. But whoever does, gets warmly invited to sit down and join in the meal. There always seems to be enough food, even when people arrive unexpectedly after the meal is over. After all, there is always Mahlon's favorite dessert -- chocolate ice cream topped with some of Franky's wickedly rich chocolate sauce.

It is not just dinner that is exciting at the Day's. At any given time, they may have various strange people living in one of their spare bedrooms. Things just seem to work out. I needed a bed on week nights, their Chilean refugee family visited every weekend. No problem. One time, I returned to my second home to find that Franky had been thinking of me in my absence. There, hanging in the bedroom that I used was a sign proclaiming that "Bald is Beautiful -- God made only so many perfect heads, the rest He covered with hair."

Franky and Mahlon Day have been members of the Urbana Friends Meeting since 1958. They are known and valued in the Meeting for their logical minds and their ability to see through irrelevant things and get to the heart of issues. They are also known for their openness to differences and for their strong support of each other's activities. Franky has served for many years on the Ministry and Oversight Committee and recently has been the Meeting's representative to the local Sanctuary Committee. Franky's interest in and commitment to the Sanctuary movement is a natural extension of her beliefs and long-standing activities. It is yet another important way that Franky applies her natural talents of hospitality and demonstrates her belief in the importance of personal involvement with others.

Leadings and Pushings

I have, in my day, given a great many lectures, none of which, alas, were suitable for this occasion. I don't expect that your interest in the properties of mathematical operations and relations can be described as burning. Sorry about that -- very sorry -- it would be an easier task. However, as I considered more suitable material, I had an insight into some part of the lesson of an ancient Sufi teaching tale concerning the Mullah Nasruddin.

The Mullah, it seems, was found one day by his friends and neighbors, on his hands and knees searching in his garden. They asked him to tell them for what it was that he searched. "I've lost my keys," he told them, and being kindly, helpful people they joined the search. So there they were; more and more people joined them on their hands and knees searching and searching -- and still the keys were not found. Eventually someone thought to ask the Mullah, "Tell us, Nasruddin, just exactly, where was it that you lost the keys?"

"Oh," said he, "in the house, in the parlor."

"And how, then, is it that we are searching in the garden?" "Oh," replied the Mullah, "the light is much better out here."

Well, as I review my somewhat sparse collection of spiritual insights, it occurs to me that maybe like Nasruddin I have chosen the quick and easy search rather than the darker places of the spirit, and have found little there because there was little there to find.

Or, to change metaphors in the middle of a stream of consciousness, I would like to take you with me on a rich spiritual journey, but in my case the fact that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a but single step is only too apt. In fact, my spiritual journey has so far been so brief that I have been cornered into a belief in, or at least a hope for, reincarnation, simply on the grounds that I clearly need much more time than has been allotted in the normal course of events in a single life.

Much inspired writing has been done by those who have made tremendous spiritual leaps and bounds and are moved to report back to those of us who are bringing up the rear, so to speak.

In a workshop at FGC this summer it was pointed out that we either have a "road to Damascus experience" or we experience slow spiritual growth. As I contemplated this it came to me that while the "road to Damascus" experience is startling, thrilling and an efficacious boost along one's spiritual journey, it really doesn't help to be told about it because there is no way in which those of us not so benefited can plan or strive for a "road to Damascus" experience. By its nature, it happens or it doesn't -- and for most of us it doesn't.

As for us slow movers who are still back near the starting point -- maybe duffers can benefit from comparing notes, on the same general theory I used when I sent the youngest of our children off to nursery school, to show them that there were other beings as handicapped by extreme youth as they themselves were.

My spiritual journey -- such as it has been -- has been in some ways a fortuitous series of spiritual mishaps.

My earliest spiritual recollection is of a period just before Easter when I was about four or five, and was explaining to my mother how much I was looking forward to the gifts the Easter Bunny was to bring for me. My mother, who was a woman of great honesty and who detested any form of deception, assured me that the Easter Bunny is just a myth, and that the goodies were provided by my loving parents. The next step was to ask about Santa Claus -- yes he too is just a myth -- and the Christmas goodies were likewise provided by my loving parents. Well, children learn by generalizing from specific cases, and the next case of provider of goodies was God, so I duly asked. My mother was raised a Scotch Presbyterian in Canada, with a deep respect for truth, and by the time I met her she was at least agnostic, if not atheist, so she explained that, about the existence of God, I would have to make my own decisions. Now, even at that age, I could sense that a God whose existence depended on my decision was in a fair way to non-existence, and in

any case, I didn't have much faith in such a God! Like my mother, I became at least an agnostic and postponed further decisions until more evidence rolled in.

The next step took place in boarding school where I spent the last two years of high school. It is well known that no one in our culture has a peaceful passage through adolescence -- and I was no exception; in fact, I was sufficiently confused within myself to wonder whether a visit with a psychiatrist might be a good idea. However, first of all I didn't really want to explain myself to anyone else. Any attempts I had made up till then had not been very reassuring, and besides I was not at all comfortable with the thought of the stir I would make at the boarding school if I were to go up to someone in authority at the school -- the headmistress, maybe -- and asked to see a psychiatrist! The mind boggled and the spirit shrank.

It was then that I returned to the question of the existence of God, and after reflection I decided that whether or not God existed didn't really bother me; I was going to talk to God as though God was there and listening. This provided a presence that I found a great deal easier to deal with than I could have found a fellow human being, and while the problems didn't melt away they were somehow not nearly so oppressive to deal with, since they were shared.

That presence has become a very real part of my life, so much so that when, about twenty years later, I applied for membership in our monthly meeting, I could with clear conscience state that I have a belief in a Divine Presence. At this date, thirty years still later, I'm not sure I was asked so to state, but I was prepared to do so.

I started to become a Quaker when I was in boarding school and attended Haverford Meeting. When I went to college I was impressed by the attitude of quiet self-possession that it seemed to me the Quaker girls had and that certainly I did not -- it was particularly noticeable in one girl, Margie, whose tranquility I really admired. About two years ago I re-encountered Margie at a college reunion. I was moved to explain to her that she had made such an impression on me in college days that -- behold -- today I am a Quaker. At this Margie laughed and assured me that she is, was, and always has been a member of the Episcopal Church, the church into which I had been christened at a tender age and had left in adolescent rebellion.

In the course of wandering around loose for better than sixty five years I have gathered a collection of puzzles, paradoxes, contradictions and occasional insights that I sometimes like to take out and ponder, some of which I propose to share with you. One that floats to the top because it is light is the paradox of the Quaker who out of the silence ministers at some length on the beauties of silence.

Then there is the paradox of humility. Humility is rather like cotton candy. Cotton candy is there to be bitten but when you bite it, it isn't there. If I ask myself "Am I being humble?" the answer is "No" for if I were truly humble it would never occur to me to ask. True humility is the complete renunciation of self; to be truly humble is to live completely in the hands of God.

This leads me to speculate that maybe the most saintly of saints are in fact so humble that they never catch the public eye, that they live among us unrecognized as an unseen leaven in the lump

of humanity, not unlike the Buddhist Bodhisattvas who, on attaining enlightenment, choose to remain bound to the wheel of lives in order to assist the rest of us on our spiritual journeys.

A closely related thought is the balance between giving and receiving. A cliché becomes a cliché because its obvious truth leads to its frequent repetition. "Familiarity breeds contempt" and so a cliché is not without honor save in its own land -- where it is too well known. The particular cliché I have in mind is "It is more blessed to give than to receive." What then can be said about the person who, by being in a position to receive, gives another the opportunity to be blessed by giving? The receiver is in fact a giver of blessing and so we start around again.

This is not quite the empty cycle of rhetoric it at first appears. When we have the chance to help someone else, we are in fact enriched thereby. Though this kind of pious statement somehow gives me the itch, it would appear to be true that most of us would much rather help than be helped. In fact, Thoreau was quoted as having said, "If I knew some one were coming to do me good, I would run as fast as I could in the other direction."

Listening is a Quaker mode of giving and receiving. Listening is in a sense a sacrament that is central to the practice of Quaker worship.

We gather in meeting for worship to listen to the voice within, to listen for continuing revelation, and to listen to whatever messages may come to us from ministries. It is laid upon us to reflect upon all these ministries by holding them in the light to come to know in just what way each ministry is designed to speak to our individual conditions. We have all experienced ministries which posed real spiritual challenges in this regard.

Through listening we give and receive. When we listen to a problem that a friend may lay before us, the act of expressing the problem helps the friend see more clearly the nature and the cause and often the healing of the problem. On our side, when we listen we see ourselves reflected and in that reflection we see that within ourselves is the potential for all those things of which our friend speaks, and by extension, we know that we have within ourselves the potential for a tremendous spectrum of acts from extreme good to extreme evil. When we recognize this potential within ourselves we confess our common humanity and at the same time we salute that of God in each of us. In this way communication becomes communion.

It is this bilateral aspect of giving that many years ago brought to my attention the fact that nothing I did was done for the sake of pure altruism -- whatever I did, I did because there was enough in it for me to lead me to want to do it -- it began to dawn on me that perhaps there is no such as altruism. We do those helpful things we do, not from pure love of doing good, which would be altruism, but because by doing them we feel better about ourselves or by not doing them we will not like ourselves -- in short we need to behave in such a way that we enjoy living with ourselves. Thus, in general, our motives are selfish. In fact, I must view with suspicion those efforts that one makes whose sole purpose is to save one's soul. In the first place, it really seems most self-seeking, in the second place, it feels rather like lifting oneself by the bootstraps, and in the third place, it seems like a matter best left to the Almighty in any case.

The story is told of Thoreau that as he lay on his death bed his aunt came to call.

"Henry David," she asked, "Have you made your peace with God?"

Thoreau's reply was something on the order of: "I was not aware that God and I had fallen out."

It is true that various mythologies, or theologies -- as you choose -- depict a sort of celestial bookkeeper keeping columns of debits and credits on our assorted deeds and misdeeds. The Egyptians pictured this as weighing the soul of the departed against a feather, and Christ is said to have likened the process to a camel going through the eye of a needle. It does seem that if one is to have faith in any sort of loving and reasonable God, it makes sense to leave the bookkeeping in divine hands, particularly since we have trouble enough locating and following our leadings without trying to add up the score. That kind of religious accountancy seems to me to belong to those I tend to think of as the children of darkness. This comes from a dichotomy -- which, like many dichotomies will not stand up very well under close scrutiny -- but many religious people fall into one of two of the light. On the whole, today's Quakerism seems to speak more to the condition of the children of the light, while the children of darkness seem to feel a need for more structure, more creed, more rules and more ritual.

I have an uneasy feeling that this sounds like the sort of self-congratulation that led the Pharisee to pray "I thank thee, Lord, that I am not as these others are." And yet I truly think that this is not the case, since I know that many of the children of darkness lead lives of far greater devotion and self-sacrifice than I.

Another curious thing that comes to mind is that my leadings generally turn out to be pushings; moreover they tend to be pushings in directions I would not have chosen to go. To coin a phrase from the Bard: "There is a power that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we may."

For example, Spanish is a language omitted from my academic life, and further, I was for many years utterly disinterested in all those things south of our border with Mexico -- with the possible exception of pre-Columbian civilizations. So, by a series of gentle nudges to which one-by-one I could not gracefully say no, I found myself in 1976 one of a committee for Chilean refugees. The nudging continued, aided and abetted by a couple of coincidences which made it clear that there were two empty bedrooms in our home at precisely the moment that a family of four Chilean refugees needed them. I was not led, I was pushed and I resisted every step of the way. However, the outcome has been that my life has been tremendously enriched.

There are ramifications in this process. The horrors of the role played by our government, and by companies based in this country, in the overthrow of the elected Chilean government were pointed out to me and I learned that "Interrogation" does not just mean being asked questions. That was only the beginning of my education in this direction. The role of the CIA in training torturers in Argentina, Chile, and other countries, the support of our government for Pinochet, for Somoza, and a number of other brutal dictators, the repeated invasions of Nicaragua, and the founding and the training of Somoza's National Guard, the military aid given to the government of El Salvador in its war on its own people, the millions given in military aid to the Contras who target medical and educational facilities in Nicaragua -- all this and much more have left me very deeply moved to help to bring about what changes I can. I want to be proud of my country for the good it can bring to the world, but I am profoundly distressed by the evil it seems to spread.

My daughter Jean, some years ago, explained, from Italy, that she would not return to this country because it is so corrupt. Coming from Italy this seemed odd -- until, on further thought, I realized that Italy cannot afford to export its corruption; we can and we do.

The husband and father of our Chilean family had been a supporter of Allende and was imprisoned and tortured -- was in fact released from prison on the understanding that he and his family would leave their country immediately. The wife and mother of the family has become an occupational therapist since coming here and, because of her husband's experiences, she has become very much interested in the treatment and rehabilitation of victims of torture.

Our youngest daughter who spent some time in Korea and several years in the Philippines has come home to study nursing, and she too is interested in the treatment of victims of torture.

Now I was brought up in the belief that the whole subject of torture was unladylike and that it was simply not "nice" to express any interest whatsoever in the topic. Nevertheless, because my English is considerably more fluent than that of my Chilean friends and my leisure time more abundant than that of my student daughter, in order to help them with their studies, I have spent many hours in the medical library gathering as much information about the treatment of victims of torture as I could find.

Another nudge came one day when it was announced in meeting that foster homes were needed for young adolescent refugees from Southeast Asia, young boat people who had arrived unaccompanied in this country after the Vietnamese war. Again we had the space and again there was the need, and for a while we had both Chilean and Vietnamese refugees under our roof. The political pressures were particularly interesting -- inasmuch as our government had labeled the Chilean government of Allende "Communist" so our Chilean friends had fled the oppression of the so-called "Democracy" of Pinochet, while our Vietnamese foster sons had fled the oppression of the Communist regime in Vietnam. It was by no means clear that either Chileans or Vietnamese were deeply convinced that the call to offer aid should be independent of political considerations, but on the whole I think we all made creditable efforts to celebrate our common humanity.

By this time it was becoming reasonably clear that I was being led or pushed into an interest in the problems of refugees. I really don't know how the Sanctuary movement first came to my attention -- God moves in subtle ways his intentions to make known, but I did become aware that an ecumenical committee was being formed to consider how sanctuary could be offered in our community to Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees. The process by which our Meeting became part of the group of religious institutions offering sanctuary was not simple, nor was it brief. This was not so much that the Meeting was reluctant to take part as that it seemed very difficult to gather together enough of the Meeting at any one time to discuss the matter and arrive at a consensus that would commit the Meeting to action. It was much too serious a decision to take without making sure that the Meeting was well and truly in support.

However, once the decision was taken to join in the local Sanctuary, the meeting has been most supportive both in finances and in people willing to help with the work.

The first family to whom sanctuary was offered was a Salvadoran couple who have since moved to Canada with the baby daughter born to them in Sanctuary. At present we have a Guatemalan family who with their three lively children are working to learn English and the other skills they will need in their new lives.

The stories of killings and oppression told by these families and many other refugee families have moved both our local sanctuary and many other sanctuaries across the country to feel impelled to work not only to aid the refugees who come to us but also, and perhaps more importantly, to do what we can to change the conditions that force them to flee their homes. Since our government is in many ways responsible for the sufferings of these people, it seems only fitting that those of us who are aware of these wrongs should make every effort to right them, and to let others know about them.

I am reminded of the little girl who was asked to report on a book about rabbits. The report was brief: "This book tells me more about rabbits than I care to know."

Sometimes I feel that my leadings or pushings have seen to it that I have learned more about the evils of this world than I care to know, and that, while clearly I can't do away with all these evils I am certainly called upon to help improve the situation.

It is both in answering this call and in what my friend who is an OT, or occupational therapist, refers to as ADL, activities of daily living, that I have found our monthly meeting to be truly a community of faith and practice.

It is interesting to note that in the past ten years or maybe longer our Meeting as a whole has not been caught up in any one activity, but rather has served as a source of support to individuals within the meeting who have pursued the concerns to which their leadings compelled them. This support takes various forms -- sometimes financial, sometimes helping hands, and always spiritual rest and encouragement.

Perhaps the deepest strength that Quakerism has to offer us is the recognition that the things of the spirit and the things of the world are two sides of the same reality. The way we live in the world is a reflection of our spiritual lives, and our spiritual lives are empty of meaning unless they are reflected in the ways in which we deal with the world. We need to be able to identify those times when the weary soul has a need to find refreshment and healing. These are the times when we are so caught up in the whirl of the world's affairs that we need to listen to the voice that says:

"Don't just do something; *SIT THERE!!*"

There is a story of a party of explorers early in the history of the conquest of this country. They were making their way west with the aid of an Indian guide, pushing on further and faster each day until one morning the explorers turned out of their bed rolls and hurried to eat and break camp with great bustling about, but when all was packed up and ready they found the guide sitting on a log.

"Come on, come on -- it's time to go; its getting late!" And the guide sat there in silence.

"Hey! Get a move on. We're going." And the guide sat there in silence.

This went on for a while and finally they asked the guide what the problem was.

"Well," said the guide, "I'm waiting for my soul to catch up with me."

Some of the mystics of the past, among them Brother Laurence and Thomas Kelly, have spoken of living in the constant knowledge of the presence of God and living in such a way that every act from the greatest to the simplest is offered up to God as an act of worship.

It is this seeking to know the presence of God that makes community in the Quaker Meeting. It is this that brings us into the meeting for worship, it is this that we strive for in our meetings for business, and it is the knowledge of the presence of God that we hope to express with our lives.

It is easy to understand this as the highest form of Quakerism, while acknowledging that it is not uniquely Quaker. To achieve this as a way of life is unquestionably a worthy goal. However, I must confess that I fall far short. What I find is that there seems to be an erratic swing between those periods when my thoughts and acts are for the most part turned outward to the problems presented by living in the world today, but that whatever strength and energy and wisdom I can bring to bear on these problems has its roots in those periods in which I can withdraw and offer to the inner light those perplexities of the spirit that accumulate.

However, there is a quote from Hamlet which I keep to ponder in my heart as a shield against hubris -- and as a focus for sober reflection.

"The time is out of joint; Oh cursed spite That ever I was born to set it right."