

Plummer Lecture Given to Illinois Yearly Meeting, Seventh Month 1994

Pat Wixom



Introduction of Pat Wixom

Patricia M. Wixom has become a part of midwest Quaker circles only fairly recently. She married Robert L. Wixom in 1986 and moved to Columbia, Missouri, where she continues to work as a research associate in the field of Neuroscience. Pat has attended Friends Meetings since her college days in Cambridge, Mass. She was formerly a member of London Grove Meeting in Pennsylvania, but transferred her membership to Columbia Meeting in 1988. Pat has nine adult children and one grandchild. Her interest in interpersonal relationships and criminal justice have led her to active participation in AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) workshops. Her Plummer lecture gives many other autobiographical details.

Note: citations are of works sorted alphabetically in the [Sources](#) list, and are not numbered sequentially.

Awakening to the Life Within

Introduction

Dear Friends,

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to examine and to share with you my spiritual journey. Although this journey begins for each of us the day we are born, my awakening to the spiritual life was tied to my conviction of Friends beliefs, especially the belief in that of God in every person. Jonathan Plummer, along with Emma Flitcraft, was one of the organizers of the 1st World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. In his opening remarks to Friends he said, "...A new day is dawning. A day of clearer vision in which we can see that all human beings, wherever living, and holding whatever religious faith they may, are children of the same Spiritual Father, however differently we may name Him...It is under such hopes as these that we, as Friends, have met in this session, to present...a statement of the faith that has led us to feel God's love flow into our hearts, and out from our hearts toward the whole brotherhood of the race." (11) To feel God's love flow into our hearts, and out from our hearts towards the whole of humanity and the creation is to awaken to our spiritual journey, to the reality of the life within.

At the 2nd World's Parliament of Religions last fall in Chicago, the Dalai Lama was asked, "What is the purpose of our life?" He wrote, "Brothers and sisters, we are all just human beings. Like everyone else we seek to find happiness and avoid suffering. This is both our right and the very purpose of our lives." In his address he said, "It is becoming more and more obvious that materialism does not hold the answers to our happiness and comfort...We must sincerely practice and implement what we believe. If you practice not just one or two weeks, but year by year, eventually a new experience will develop and through that, you become a happier person with more self-confidence, less fear, more able to communicate with other fellow humans." (3) This morning I want to share with you the development of my happiness, of more self confidence, less fear, and a greater ability to communicate with my fellow humans.

I want to talk about awakening to that life within, and central to that awakening is finding the courage to be myself. We've talked in the last few days about finding the courage to be responsible, and that is part of this growing process: growing into an awareness of the life within and finding the courage to express it and act upon it. Part of my spiritual journey is being a Friend and part being a woman and part being Pat Wixom. I had never heard of Quakers until my college years when my roommate took me to the Cambridge Friends Meeting in Boston. I was a science major, seeking for the "truth" in the natural world, trying to understand the causes and consequences of natural phenomena, accepting the scientific ethic of experimental evidence rather than dogma, and of open investigation and questioning. I was immensely attracted to Friends, to the seeking, to the universality, to the individual formulation of religious belief based on experience, and God conceived as an inherent part of the fabric of the natural creation and an inherent part of our lives. I responded as did Robert Barclay in his description of his first experience of a Friend's Meeting: "When I came into the silent assemblies of God's people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up." (7) And he speaks of the experience as being "that by which we are bound to the Lord and to each other." (7) I feel very fortunate that I came into Friends Meetings, where I would be left to discover for myself, *forced to discover for myself*, what was truth for me and what it required from me.

I was convinced of the reality of God and the spiritual nature of creation one evening at dusk walking down a Cambridge street after swimming. I felt so at one with the tree-lined street, awed and at the same time joyful. I knew I was part of a creation which was greater than myself, and the connection to it was within me. Somehow the whole scene seemed to express profoundly the immanence of God. This was experience speaking and I accepted it. We can't rationally quite grasp spiritual truth, so we have to experiment and experience - each one of us has to find it anew for herself. Every one is on their own unique spiritual journey, taught by our Quaker heritage, but confirmed and validated only by our own feelings and experiences and by sharing and learning from others.

We are, most of us, ordinary people. I am an ordinary person. But we can do what we do with love, and an inward surety, and even grace, confident and peaceful in the enduring love of God simply *because* there is that of God in every one. What is that life which is within us? I believe it is a knowledge of God or Spirit, a feeling of the presence of God, an awakening (an exploration, a realization) of the process of acting with God through one's individual life. A feeling of acceptance and sometimes a feeling of joy spontaneously arising. Why do we feel this joy, this unity with others in worship, this unity with the world of nature? We don't know. It's part of that Light within. This Light is present in every man and woman of whatever nation or race, all over the world. As Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk, says, "Someone who is awake, who knows, who understands, is called a Buddha. Buddha is in every one of us. We are all Buddhas, because only through us can understanding and love become tangible and effective. I entrust myself to Buddha, (in Quaker terms to the Light within), Buddha entrusts herself to me." [\(9\)](#)

This is part of the nature of the world. As William Penn once said, "We can fall no deeper than God's arms can reach, however deep we fall." [\(7\)](#) God has no hands or feet but ours. I am an active part of God's work in the world. We are all on a spiritual journey, growing into this process of acting with God.

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Awakening to the Life Within

We are born with a life within, on a spiritual journey and yet it is somehow forgotten and we have to rediscover it, awaken to the life within. Elise Boulding has described her experience as a belief that we are born remembering, born with a recognition of the naturalness of centeredness, born with a coming into internal surety and joy by coming into this relationship with God. She wrote, "The fact that I have been able in some way to reach back to the early rememberings, to the freshness of the feeling of God's presence as I knew it when small, has been enormously important in keeping what wholeness there has been in my life. The inner listening place I developed so early has always been there for me in a very conscious way during times of unbearable stress. It is a space that cannot be crowded. And yet, as an adult, I lost the feeling of the immanence of God's presence. I only remembered the space." [\(1\)](#)

Both these concepts: being born with this life of the spirit and awakening to it speak to me. I was a so-called army brat. My father was a West Point graduate, an officer in the chemical corps. I had one brother, a year and a half older. So we moved about every two years, among somewhat

limited postings since the chemical corps is a rather small branch, up and down the east coast and back and forth to Hawaii. My father was a gentle, surprisingly shy and quiet person, different from what you would imagine an army officer to be, and full of integrity. He really believed he was "keeping the peace," by helping to maintain a strong defensive force, and he was in love with America and its history of freedom, participatory democracy, and the individual freedom to aspire. My mother was his helpmate, also quiet and gentle. So I grew up in a quiet household, secure, very reserved in verbal interaction and physical affection, and constantly moving with respect to the outside world.

But I was a spunky little girl - I don't really remember those preschool years but I have seen pictures, and I brought a few along and here is this little kid right up in the forefront, sticking out her tummy, arms on hips, and a devilish gleam in the eye, making funny faces. You probably all have pictures like that - little kids just full of themselves, making faces at the camera. Bob and I have some of our grandchildren like that. Little kids so secure, so sure of themselves, so full of life - born remembering, born with the surety of being children of God, secure in being loved and in being themselves.

My favorite story of myself as a spunky little kid is how I learned to swim. We were stationed at Fort Shafter in Hawaii, right on the ocean, for two years when I was about 2 to 4 years old. My brother was enrolled in a swimming class, which started out in the wading pool, but I was considered too young. Well, I hung around anyway, in the way of little sisters. When the teacher felt everybody had learned the basic elements she went into somewhat deeper water and said, "Who's going to be the first one to swim to me here?" Guess who - little Patty! I have a picture of a little head in a white bathing cap bobbing around in the ocean a few months later.

I lost that spunkiness somehow about the time I started school. Centered on seeking love and assurance from those around me, I was the good little girl, the good student, the good wife and mother - (as so many of us have been) trying my very hardest to be all that I could be but somehow in the very process of trying and relying on those around me to tell me how I was doing, I was losing myself, my inner assurance. I truly can't quite understand how I lost myself, but I know I did. Growing up shy and female. It happens to many women. I was well into middle age before I began to have the individual experiences to overcome my timidity, but I am deliberately reclaiming some of my spunkiness when I give myself the adjective name of Perky Pat in our Alternatives to Violence workshops in Missouri. The men in the prisons are always amused at this adjective, but they come up with some good ones, too, such as Bald Eagle Ben, Journeyman John, Considerable Chris, Awesome Al, and Energized Eric. Think of a good one for yourself, and then live up to it.

As a child I was unattached, rootless, unidentified with place or people. As a youngster I spent a lot of time making mud pie sculptures in the back yard, climbing trees to show I was better than my brother at some things, and also as a solitary child simply perching in them and contemplating the world: I certainly can claim no natural sensitivity or early spiritual awakenings, like John Woolman and many other early Quaker stalwarts, brought up in a religious atmosphere and incorporating it into their self concepts very early. No, I was pretty tactless - I remember once when I was maybe 10 years old my good friend broke her arm and her mother asked me to stay the night to take her mind off it. After I had made a few comments to

the effect that things were not so bad, she could have had two broken arms, I was sent home, and I knew I had failed to provide comfort but I didn't quite know why.

I grew up without religious training or emphasis, but I remember an almost mystical experience in connection with horseback riding. I was a lucky youngster in that Schofield Barracks in Hawaii, where I spent four preteen years, had a mule train, and consequently also horse stables. The youngsters on the post had riding lessons and then could take out horses to ride around the post and the fields. I spent a lot of time riding, often by myself, occasionally with other youngsters. Once a year the horses were taken across the mountains to bathe in the sea. It sounds like going to the spa, but indeed it did have a rejuvenating effect. The easygoing horse that I usually rode, on our next ride suddenly became a Pegasus, skimming over the ground so effortlessly it felt as if we were flying. I was utterly amazed and somehow overjoyed and sensed there was a boundless joy in creation as it should be, full of energy and life.

We don't experience that too often, but I experienced it vicariously more recently when we took our children, perhaps 2 to 10 years old, to the Chincoteague Seashore for the first time. They had never seen the ocean. Seeing it was amazing enough, but when they waded in and then almost immediately lay down and felt the waves lifting and tugging at them, they laughed and squealed with surprise and joy. I still love to float in the ocean and feel that rise and fall of the waves. The world is such an amazing place, and we have such an amazing capacity for wonder and joy, and for mystical experience, a sudden recognition of our connection to the world, to the presence in the world of that Spirit which is also within us, a recognition of that of God within.

I was very slow to mature; I went directly from a small disciplined army family with very little talking to school where I worked hard and where life was structured and secure. I went straight to graduate school in physical chemistry and my first marriage to a strong, silent husband. We met when beginning graduate school at the University of Illinois and were married after only one semester. When there is a decision to be made, I tend to make it without hesitation or looking back. While there we became acquainted with Bob and Edith Wixom. This was a serendipitous occurrence and paved the way to re-meeting Bob at an FGC conference in 1984, which led to my being here with you today. At that time Bob and Edith were also newlyweds and we found community in the circle of a Quaker graduate student group. A year later with our oldest boy, Brad, we used to go out to Robert Allerton Park to see the blue Chinese porcelain Fu Dogs and the bronze statues in the woods. I revisited Allerton Park this spring on my way to the Women's Weekend, and looked with joy at the bluebells covering the woods. As in earlier days I walked out to the Sun Singer standing by itself in a meadow; a 30 foot high bronze figure representing Apollo and facing east with arms outstretched to the new day, and remembered how Brad, about a year old then, would run around the base. The Sun Singer always impressed me with its open, accepting, greeting attitude. At the Women's Weekend, I was amazed when a Friend completely independently told us of her fascination with this open stretching to the heavens and that it was the earliest posture of peoples in worship, called Orantes. (5) Just to take this posture opens one up to the world. I believe these serendipitous occurrences have meaning for us and we should pay attention to them.

To some extent we all gradually mature, have our various life experiences, try to balance in some way what we want to do and what we feel is good and right to do. I raised nine children, a

number not to be thought of nowadays, even though two were adopted. We lived in the country with only one car, so I was home with young children as my constant companions. I was busy cooking, cleaning, washing diapers every day, but also with more creative activities, sewing clothes and knitting mittens, taking great delight in freezing and canning quantities of vegetables from our large garden, amusing myself by reading children's books to the children and to myself. My time was my own but I didn't make very adult use of it. I was lacking in activities outside the home and in adult stimulation, for we were a very quiet, nonverbal couple.

So this is somewhat of a feminist story. How a woman can be intelligent, very well educated, have and manage a large family, and yet still be so very passive, unassertive, lacking in individual definition and so, really, shut off from the life within, from the expression of what is uniquely one's self. I felt very much as Elise Boulding describes - too busy to pay much attention to self or God. She writes: "I was not the only young mother in the community who had a need to justify her existence! There was, I believe, undue busyness. God was never absent, but often ignored, and I did a lot of forgetting in those years, especially as the children grew older. ...We tidied and cleaned our much too roomy and overfurnished houses, cooked unnecessary quantities of food, moved in our daily round quite protected from suffering of every kind except the peculiar dull aches of affluence. ...All around me were well-intentioned, socially conscious people, supporting good causes. At Friends Meeting on Sunday mornings I would sit in the silence with all these good people, listen to words of kindly mutual encouragement, and often poetic insight, and return as they did to the domestic comforts which sealed us all off from the living God." [\(1\)](#)

In our present culture of busyness and opportunity, novel sights and ever-present activity, it is easy to live on the surface of life, to be continuously distracted. This is one of the things that Friends and Meeting for Worship have meant to me - a time to be silent, undistracted by entertainment or work, a time to seek that inner life. I think often of the quotation from Isaac Pennington: "Give over thine own willing, give over thine own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything, and sink down to the seed which God sows in thy heart and let that be in thee, and grow in thee, and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is his portion." [\(4\)](#) To give up one's thinking, planning, expectations, and let God's spirit rise in the creative movement of the inner Spirit, and then to do that which has suddenly become apparent, is what Quakerism is all about.

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Finding the Courage to be Myself

Everybody has their own spiritual journey - mine involved a lot of solitude as a child both from natural shyness and constant moving. I'm sure that to some extent I'm remaking my own history when I think of myself as so very shy, so very passive. I did go away to college, traveled by myself, managed time and money, decided to attend Quaker Meeting, much to the unspoken distress of my father. I raised children as they came along without being upset at my seeming lack of control over the process. I really loved having children. I count that as another mystical experience, perhaps the greatest one, and was secretly glad at the failure of contraceptive

methods. But what I remember is not making decisions for myself, not examining my life for the possibilities of change and growth, and even when a possibility was discovered, not insisting upon it. Instead there was just a very gradual maturation within the confines of other people's expectations.

I really was afraid of interpersonal contact. I lived in a world of my own and seemed to feel I was invisible so long as I didn't say anything or do anything unexpected. I didn't show the usual adolescent rebellion, rather I continued to be what others approved of and wanted me to be. So I was a very slow learner of the interior life, because only by describing and naming who you are to other people, one by one, so that they can respond, do you truly *own* who you are. And this takes a great deal of courage, for we are all afraid that we will be unacceptable, rejected. By example and expectation, and I think generally as a woman I was brought up to please, to accept another's definition of who I am. It's so much easier just to do what's expected of you - what your parents, teachers, husband want, and never say what is on your mind. It's even considered a virtue - being adaptable, serene, cooperative, peaceful. So how did I find the courage to be myself?

Sometimes you read something which could be your very own experience. When I read the Swarthmore Lecture of 1986 from the Women's Group of London Yearly Meeting, I could say wholeheartedly with those Quaker women "I was brought up to believe that complete fulfillment comes through marriage and motherhood. I believe *now* that we need to be more than someone's daughter, or someone's wife, or someone's mother; each of us needs to be a person in her own right. From my experience as a woman; as a daughter, a wife, a mother, I have been able to step forward and to grow spiritually. ...The change in myself over recent years has been quite staggering. From finding I was not what I had expected myself to be, to finding what I really was - a competent person who still had potential for growth - was like being born again." (6)

I've come to realize how important it is to have open relationships with people. If I talk openly about how I feel I lose my sense of isolation, experience my emotions more fully, and find out I'm O.K. It was only when we bought a house in West Grove, PA, that I really lay down roots and it was only then that I joined Friends Meeting, after having attended five other Meetings as we moved about. Before joining Meeting I had been a stranger, a visitor, observing but not participating, not allowing myself to be known. For all those years I was going to Meeting, I remained shy and unattached to others. I believe the settling down, becoming rooted in one place was important for me. I began rather tentatively to take part in the Meeting, mostly in First Day School activities. Finally I spoke in Meeting with great fear, pounding heart and trembling. I began to voluntarily express myself outside of the family, and to my astonishment was accepted. The experience of the life and light within myself and within others, the inward centeredness, is what was and is, important to me. The silent waiting in worship of Friends brought out that inward centeredness.

To become obedient to the Light within, to have the courage to be one's self may be a gradual process or, as for Elise Boulding, a sudden conversion experience. She writes, "I suddenly saw myself one night as a small frog in the bottom of a deep well, leaping and leaping to get up and over the side. All my life I had been leaping. I knew where the sun was, I knew which way to jump, I knew there was an outside - another place to be. Yet I kept falling back into the bottom

of the well. [Until one night there was] the death of that old try-hard frog, the birth of a new creature who found her way over the top of the well and into a new world. I saw how we all chained ourselves to daily rhythms which were bound to defeat us. Day after day we recapitulated the old cycle of effort, irritation, impatience and anger - softened by small epiphanies of love and remorse. The spirit had to break through from time to time, because spirit is our very nature, but how tiny the eruptions, how heavy-handed our daily behavior." (1) For me there has been a much more gradual maturation and slow recognition of the spiritual life within. And perhaps I am not called to some remarkable dedication or revision of life style. But certainly I am called to become aware of my spiritual life and the continual choices I make which God, this Light within, can inform, and given sufficient inner space, creative changes of direction and surety will occur. For most of us, certainly for me, I know there is a place of complete reliance upon and obedience to the inner Spirit, but I know I am not wholly committed to it. I am not outside the well, although I keep jumping and occasionally touch down in that green land. If you have been in the well your whole life relying on others, it is awfully hard, scary and risky to commit yourself to being inwardly reliant, outside the well. That is the courage to be wholly yourself, wholly responsible.

Well, we continued to have problems within our marriage, compounded by a child's problems which caused us to seek counseling in the form of a marriage enrichment group. And emotions we had never been aware of, let alone talked about, began to surface. Finally my husband sought new opportunities for happiness, and that was all right with me at that time because I *knew* with all my heart we needed to be separated for a while to allow for individual growth and he could not accept that. The Boston Women's Cooperative wrote in "Ourselves, Growing Older": "The breakup of a marriage, however devastating it may seem, carries with it the potential for a new life. With age, we grow in maturity, experience, and confidence, qualities which have a beauty and power to attract in their own right. Best of all, these are qualities that reflect how we feel about ourselves and do not depend on the perception of others." (2) Our spiritual life depends on how we feel about ourselves, not how others feel about us.

So I was on my own for the first time in my life, really, at 53 years of age; on my own, making my own decisions, managing my life without that feeling of being always under another's authority. I was in graduate school, getting a degree in neuroscience, which was what precipitated the divorce, and going back to school came about because of the counseling and inner growth.

My spiritual journey up to that point was largely unplanned. From undergraduate to graduate school, marriage, having children, making decisions for their health and activity and family life - these take patience and love, and were what I had to do, the tasks set by the circumstances of my life. But I would reserve courage to be myself for stepping forward deliberately in a new situation, and exposing my true self. "Courage is necessary to make ourselves vulnerable by exposing who we really are. Courage is necessary to withstand others' opinions, needs, wants, judgments and rely on our own." (10) This quotation is from a book by Sue Patton Thoele, called "The Courage to Be Yourself." I happened to find this book (serendipity again) just after I knew I wanted to talk on the courage to be myself. I found it very helpful and accurate to my experience. It took courage to object to some of my husband's relationships with the children, it

took courage to speak in Meeting, and it took courage to go back to school when I was 47 and a long-time housewife. In fact, it took courage to even begin to be myself.

We all have some courage. "Courage is the ability to do what needs to be done, or feel what needs to be felt, in spite of fear. Willingness to risk or act even when we are frightened or in pain. Sometimes just getting up in the morning and proceeding with your life takes tremendous courage." (10) Another Friend at the Women's Weekend casually mentioned that it took much more courage for her just to drive, to get there, than to do public action or make a speech, which frightens me to my core. It takes courage to face loneliness, courage to face a difficult partnership and keep working on it. It takes courage to change, and courage to be deliberately different and on your own. Recognize your own courage and believe in it, and be gentle with yourself when it is difficult to summon courage. Thich Nhat Hanh writes: "If you cannot be compassionate to yourself, you will not be able to be compassionate to others." (9) And Dorothy Hutchinson: "Neither the world's work nor that of the Society of Friends is done by the spiritual geniuses...Don't underestimate the value of the *companions* of the prophet." (12)

Does it take courage to be your own self? Of course. We are all dependent on the love and support of those we trust. To risk losing that by being ourselves, perhaps somebody very different from our partner's and families' expectations, is scary and hard. We need the internal surety, whether it comes gradually or suddenly, that there is a Life within to have the courage to be ourselves, and we need the acceptance and understanding of others. The Quaker Women of London Yearly Meeting wrote, "When the 'Door of Change' is opened, it is up to us as individuals whether we walk through it. We can only change our own attitudes, not those of others. We can only say to other people 'this is how I feel', 'this is what works for me', and hope that through our example, living our lives in the way we are sure is right for us, they will understand." (6)

We need to *know* that there is a harmony in the universe, a great deal of which we see as beauty, and that this harmony for people, who can choose their actions, resides in love, understanding, acceptance, caring for others, and community. To be open, unhurried, full of peace and acceptance, answering that of God in others and finding the courage to be my self and the courage to be responsible is my purpose in life.

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Have I the Courage to be Responsible?

To be responsible is to know what needs to be done and your place in this doing: courage is necessary to actually do it. To be responsible, in the spiritual life, is to respond to that of God within, to cultivate and pay attention to those small nudges of conscience. It takes courage to respond and act on them, courage to go against one's inclinations and listen to that inner voice. Douglas Steere writes, "A Basel woman mystic and physician who lived in our time and wrote under the name of Adrienne von Speyr says, 'It is hardly ever possible to see from the start all that God is to mean to one...Once open to the light, she may ask God to claim her more essentially and more profoundly. But on one condition, that she does not refuse the first small act God demands of her.' The 'first small act' may be a visit, or a letter, or a gift, or it may be a first

alert to clear the deck of one's engagements for orders that are still sealed. The mysterious thing of it all is that in God's eyes there are no 'little' things. Everything matters and everything leads to something else." (7)

One of my very small nudges was to join a Columbia Friend who has stood in vigil for peace outside the main post office in Columbia weekly for going on eleven years to protest government intervention, especially armed intervention (our present euphemism for war) and U.S. budget priorities which lead us to war and by which we all participate in war. It's a bit frightening to publicly announce a stand unpopular with some, but only by doing so can you determine whether this is an action that satisfactorily expresses that concern, and it turned out to be a good action for me.

To be responsible in *daily* tasks is to please *other people*. What takes courage is to be responsible to the life within. To accept and act on, immediately, those small nudges of the inner life, God's directions. You can't act on them unless they are allowed to surface, unless you hear them. We need the quiet centering of Meeting for Worship, and quiet times of solitude however we manage to structure them into our daily life. Being a morning person I take a walk of 20 minutes or so most mornings when I get up. I frequently get a small nudge of conscience or a change of priorities as I'm walking along. I don't feel all is lost when I refuse to, or just forget to, act on these nudges. But there is always a regret when I fail to do, or to do opportunely, a task which has somehow come to mind. For me, even to go visit our elderly Columbia Friend, Loreide, in her nursing home was something I tended to put off, had put off for some time, so I asked Friend Gertrude to go with me, or rather take me along on one of her more frequent visits, and that made it more possible for me.

Why does it take courage? Because we are afraid to be ourselves, and it takes courage to speak to that of God in others. Because it is opening ourselves up, making ourselves vulnerable. We each have a measure of safety needed, the greater the safety needed the less willing to take responsibility, to risk and be only one's self. Once awakened to the life within, you are embarked; but you can always refuse, take a safer way, try again the next time. God is patient and cannot leave us. We can only leave her.

Lucretia Mott is a good example and role model for us. As a child in Nantucket Lucretia always went to Friends Meeting for Worship on First Days. "As Lucretia began to listen on First days, the speakers often seemed to be directing questions at her. She wanted to find a way to show ... that she was living by Quaker principles... When her eyes traveled to her feet, she knew the answer. She had bows on her shoes, bright blue bows that Uncle Mayhew had brought her from the mainland. Quickly, without giving herself a chance to change her mind, she found a pair of scissors and snipped off the bows. Then, because she was bossy as well as brave, she set about convincing her sisters that they must do likewise." (8)

As a child, Lucretia snipped a pair of blue bows from her shoes in order to live up to her principles. It was as simple as that - and as difficult. As an adult when she became convinced of the evils of using the products of slave labor. "It was like parting with the right hand or the right eye," she later wrote, "but when I left the Meeting (for worship, where Benjamin Lundy had preached on the evils of slavery) I yielded to the obligation. For nearly 40 years, whatever I did

was under the conviction that it was wrong to partake of the products of slave labor." She set about "making things honest" in her house and using only goods from the free product stores. In 1840 James Miller McKim wrote of Lucretia, "Under no circumstances where principle is at stake, is she heard to ask, 'What is expedient?' 'What is policy?' 'What will folks say?' but 'What is right?' This being ascertained, the question with her is settled, and her pathway made plain." (8) Lucretia lived outside the well, knowing her way. Do we stand equally firm, even on those issues where we know the right way?

I am not an angry person usually, but I have long felt so angry even thinking of our government budget and the amount of my money being spent on bombs, cruisers, nuclear warheads, to arm the world really, and make it more dangerous for me and my family and my friends and all people. So I have examined the options. I support the Peace Tax Fund bill. I occasionally write letters to Congress though I don't consider myself to be a political activist, or very good at that. I support the Friends Committee on National Legislation and the Quaker United Nations Office. But that's not enough. It's too easy. It's not taking responsibility for what I really believe. When a single person, some years I made a token withholding of federal taxes, \$100 or so, to make my views known, to raise my head just a little bit and acknowledge what I really believed, that war is wrong. I was afraid of the consequences of breaking the law. Guess what happened. Nothing! Congressmen scolded me for not being a good citizen, but I don't have that high an opinion of Congressmen anyway. When I came out to Missouri I was offered a government (NIAAA) fellowship to study the neurobiochemical effects of alcohol. As part of the paperwork I had to sign a statement which said: "Do you owe the government any money? If so, relate the circumstances." So I figured out what I owed and wrote an explanation in a few words of war tax resistance. I expected the application to be turned down, and indeed the official in Washington called the administrator of the lab, but only to ask if this application was filled out correctly and the applicant was real. Then she said something like, "Well, that must be an honest person. We need more people like that." So war tax resistance had official approval, of sorts.

I know that consequences are serious for many war tax resisters. Perhaps that is why I am really scared to go on and go further. I need a group of like-minded persons to validate my concern, alleviate my fears, and give support. Have I the courage to be responsible? By myself, no. But the sharing of that concern for responsibility, and acceptance both of the concern and the fearfulness of it by others lessens the fear. It's such a big help to say publicly, "I'm going to try to do this." We are all fearful, but hide it pretty well. Experimentally and experientially we reduce that fear by doing and finding out it's O.K. We are responsible for each other - not just our children, but our Meeting family and anybody to whom we have made a commitment. That is why it is so important to share our uncertainties, the little stops in our mind when an action is proposed, or an event happens and no action is taken. Thich Nhat Hanh says "Never blame, never try to persuade using reason and arguments. Just understanding. If you understand, and you show that you understand, you can love, and the situation will change." (9) Thich Nhat Hanh advises us to give ourselves time, but at the same time go ahead as way opens. Trust God; trust the process.

What are the things I have found on my spiritual journey so far? I feel a joy and an expectation because I feel I am awakening to the call that is within me, and I feel that this awakening has taken place largely through my involvement with Quakerism. This is first an inner awakening,

that results in outer change of behavior and action in the world. I don't feel completely opened to that yet but I feel an expectation, a joy, in what is happening. My message is a very practical one, down to earth, because I don't think I've plumbed the center yet. I'm certainly not out of that well. But I can tell when someone is speaking from their center; we all can. That's why I love Friends Meeting for Worship and for Business, because there I have heard and seen Friends speaking from their center. When this happens, I am also connected, and my center becomes a little more apparent, a little stronger. Always it is for me a reaffirmation of my belief as a Friend in the inner Light and the spirit of God within. Isaac Penington says "I have this to say: 'Where art thou? Art thou in thy soul's rest? And dost thou feel the life and power flowing in upon thee from the free fountain? Is the load really taken off from thy back? Hast thou found this, or hast thou missed of it? Let thine heart answer.' The gospel state is a state of feeling the presence and power of the Lord. It begins in a sweet, powerful touch of life, and there is a growth in the life to be administered and waited for daily. Now art thou here, in the living power, joined to the spring of life, drawing water of life out of the well of life with joy?" (4)

So my prescription for seeking that life within and finding the courage to be responsible to it is: (and I'm speaking to myself now, urging myself on) First, get my priorities straight. The Dalai Lama said at the World Parliament of Religions last fall the primary purpose of human beings is to be happy - to find themselves and the life within. Put that ahead of success, accomplishment and money, even social justice and serving the world. This doesn't mean those things shouldn't be done or that one will not be impelled to engage in the world by responsibility to the Life Within. Secondly, take time for that life within you to be heard and to act upon it and to grow and to become empowered. Isaac Penington said "There is that near you which will guide you, oh, wait for it, and be sure ye keep to it." (4) Third, greet each new day, as the Sun Singer does, with arms outstretched, with anticipation, with sureness, and with joy. Orantes! We *are* beloved children of God - we *do* have a life within, and that life *will* give us courage.

I want to close by inviting you to sing with me (and with my friends with better voices!) this verse which expresses so well what I have been trying to say. It is most appropriate that it is a children's song, for I am but a child in the spiritual life.

I am an acorn, the packet, the seed
God is within me and God is the tree
I am unfolding the way I should be
Carved in the palm of God's hand
Sown in the soil of God's land.

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