

INTRODUCING CHILDREN AND YOUTH  
TO THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

*By*

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## THE 1960 LECTURER

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Among his Quaker writing are **Meditations Around the World**, **Quaker Leaders Speak**, and **Toward a Fourth Century of Quakerism**. Other books include **Twelve Citizens of the World**, **Introducing Children to the World**, **Leaders of New Nations**, and **Profile of Nigeria**.

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## **INTRODUCING CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT**

**Leonard S. Kenworthy**

In many ways this is a ghastly time to be alive.

Over us hangs the continuous and ominous threat of World War III with its atomic, nitrogen, and cobalt bombs and its bacteriological and chemical warfare.

In our own country and in other nations the problems of prejudice plague us and often threaten to erupt in violence.

The mobility of our population and the increasing urbanization and suburbanization of our citizenry accentuate old problems or give rise to new ones. The pressures for conformity and material comfort affect us all—usually adversely. Old standards are disappearing before new ones have been developed. Juvenile delinquency, divorce, and mental illness are at all-time highs.

Yet, in other ways, it is a great time to be alive.

The world is undergoing a series of revolutions unparalleled in human history. New nations are being formed and regional and international groups created. Hunger and disease as well as illiteracy and ignorance are being attacked on a global scale. Race prejudice is being dealt body blows. The air age is already here and the atomic age is underway. Research in human relations has confirmed many old insights and yielded a vast and valuable amount of new knowledge for us if we are willing and able to use it.

### **A. The Times Demand Quality Quakers**

Such times of crisis and change can also be times of challenge and opportunity. It was in such a period that Christianity was born. It was in another disturbed age that the Religious Society of Friends was formed.

In fact, our small group has thrived in times of tension and turmoil. Crises have brought out the best in us. Over and over when there was an unpopular cause to be championed or an unpleasant yet important job to be done, people have turned to us,

for we have developed a reputation for being able to produce well-educated, spiritually-motivated, socially-sensitive individuals.

Yet we dare not rest on our laurels if we would survive. Our greatest concern today should be to determine, so far as that is possible, whether we are still developing such outstanding people.

Are our homes, our Meetings, and our schools still producing William Penns and John Brights, Elizabeth Frys and Lucretia Motts, John Woolmans and Pierre Ceresoles, Timothy Nicholsons and Allen Jays? Are these and other agencies of our Society forming hundreds and thousands of young people who have the deep conviction and hardy courage that caused early Friends to cross the Atlantic to start life anew in this part of the globe? Are we helping to rear the kind of Quakers who were motivated to move from the south in the 19th century as entire Meetings in order to escape slavery and then were able to defy the law in their new, northern homes to man the Underground Railroad station?

Or are we producing complacent, comfortable, conforming Quakers who have little or nothing to say on such crucial issues as nuclear tests, disarmament, race relations, juvenile delinquency and a host of other pressing problems?

The times in which we live now and will probably live for the foreseeable future demand extraordinary individuals. Our Society is in dire need of hundreds and thousands of quality Quakers. Our task is to become such Friends and to rear a generation of such outstanding persons.

### **B. Some Values We Prize**

How easy it would be if we could prescribe formulas for spiritual growth as we do for physical development. But there is no quick-mix for quality Quakers now—and there never will be.

There are, however, certain traits, qualities, or values which Quakers have always stressed and which are as appropriate today as they were at any time or in any place. They are essentials of spiritual living. We have no monopoly on them but they are values which we prize highly.

Before we mention a few of them, it may be well to emphasize

that when we speak of introducing children and youth to the life of the spirit, we are actually talking about introducing them to life. These two phrases are not separate and distinct; they are one and the same thing. Only lives that are infused with the Spirit and motivated by it are lives worth living. Without such an indwelling of the Spirit of God we lead lives of "quiet desperation", to borrow a phrase from William James.

Actually what we mean by the life of the spirit is what Jesus called "the abundant life". Others have defined it variously. William James wrote that "The aim of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it." John Woolman said that "To turn all we possess into the channel of universal love because the business of our lives." An outstanding woman Friend, Jane Rushmore, recently said that "Religious living is an unending quest for the best which life affords."

With one of these statements, or any equally satisfying one, as an overall goal, what qualities should we try to develop in children and youth? It is impossible to suggest here all the values we should emphasize, but allow me to mention a few key ones.

### **1. Confidence in themselves, in others, and in God.**

Observation of children by competent psychologists, thousands of scientific studies, and the analysis of the lives of outstanding persons have made it clear that the paramount quality needed for maturity is self-confidence, self-assurance, or self-respect. Only those who like themselves, can like others. Only those who value themselves, can value others.

Jesus proclaimed this truth when he asserted that we should love our neighbors—as ourselves.

Children are going to live a long time with themselves. The self with which they are going to live should therefore be a self which they can admire. Everything we can do to help them achieve such self-respect builds spiritual maturity.

Central to the creation of such confidence is the Quaker belief of that of God in every man. Since we are endowed with a part of the Divinity, we are special, unique, rare. And because

others are also so endowed, they, too, are unique—members of God's world-wide family.

Develop a belief in children that there is Purpose in the world and a Great Power which we call God and their whole outlook on life will be broadened, deepened, heightened. Help them to learn that this Power is central rather than peripheral and readily available and their lives will be transformed and enriched.

Belief in such a Power and such an all-pervasive Purpose is the essence of the life of the spirit. This is the belief that changes lives and makes extraordinary people out of ordinary individuals.

**2. Companionship and Community.** Even more than adults, children and youth want to be liked. They crave the approval of their peers. They want to act, dress, and talk like their contemporaries. The pull of the crowd is powerful.

Unless they are linked with like-minded persons, as Alpine climbers are bound together, their climb through life is likely to be lonely and dangerous.

From our earliest days we Friends have stressed the concept of community or companionship. That is why we call ourselves a Religious Society of Friends. Children need to know and feel that others are going the same way as they are going. They need to be an integral, welcome, participating part of small fellowships from whom they can draw strength,—fellowships composed of older as well as younger people. This is a second and fundamental part of the life of the spirit.

**3. The Inquiring Mind.** The most disturbing aspect of the Friendly Way of Life to many persons is the absence of outer authority. There is no creed, no catechism, no set of church officials who have the answers. Each individual must seek his own way, with the guidance and counsel of the group. Outer authority is minimized; inner authority maximized.

As a result, Friends at their best have been pioneers. They have not been bound to the past or the status quo. They have sought new information, fresh insights, new solutions to old problems. They have been experimental-minded. This quality explains

more than anything else the tremendous contributions Friends have made to science, education, business, and social movements. It likewise explains the stress we have laid on schools and colleges, on individual reading, on study groups, and on conferences.

Introducing children and youth to the life of the spirit means helping them to think critically, to develop inner controls, to release their creative potentialities, and to educate themselves to the highest degree possible.

**4. Clarity and Commitment.** The result of self-assurance, a sense of companionship, and searching inquiry should be a clarity of purpose and a deep sense of commitment.

The many selves in a child or young person get together and organize. The scattered pieces of life's jig-saw puzzle begin to fit into a pattern. Priorities become clear. Power is released and happiness ensues—the kind of happiness Dr. Sheldon wrote about when he said, "Happiness is essentially a state of going somewhere whole-heartedly, one-directionally, without regret or reservation."

In a powerful paragraph in his **Testament of Devotion** Tom Kelly described such clarity and commitment in these words:

"Life from the center is a life of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. It is amazing. It is triumphant. It is radiant. It takes no time, but it occupies all our time. And it makes our life programs new and overcoming. We need not get frantic. He is at the helm."

Modern psychologists would call this integration or wholeness. Perhaps that is what Jesus meant when he said, "Be ye therefore perfect" or complete. Sometimes this comes suddenly in what we call conversion. Often it unfolds gradually over a period of years rather than at one special moment.

**5. Caring and Concern.** The power generated in an individual or a group is a little like water. It must flow somewhere or it becomes stagnant.

Friends learned this basic principle early and at its best ours

has been a fellowship of those who cared, whether it was for the Indian or the Negro, the mentally-ill or the prisoner, the victim of war or of persecution. If we have erred, it has been in specializing in cure rather than in prevention.

At every age level we need to help our children and youth to care for others. They may soon discover, as many of us older Friends have done, that it is sometimes easier to care for people when they are far away! How much easier it is to be concerned about colored people if they live in Kenya or South Africa rather than in Chicago, to champion the rights of Jews if they are in Germany or Israel rather than in Indianapolis, or to aid the Spanish if they are in Mexico or Cuba rather than working as migrant laborers in our country.

We certainly need to help our boys and girls and young people to care for those who are far away as well as near at hand. But we need to help them to realize that caring takes place best in face-to-face relationships and those can be carried on most effectively in our own neighborhoods and communities.

And we need to encourage them to heed John Woolman's advice about channeling their efforts. They should be interested in many movements of social and economic concern, but they need to develop as early as possible one or more special interests and to concentrate on them. Deserts are made to bloom not by spraying them with water, but by irrigating them through channels.

**6. Spiritual Conditioning and Courage.** Life is much like mountain climbing. There is fun and exhilaration in it. There are wonderful vistas for those who climb high enough and have eyes to see. But there are also steep stretches, hazardous turns, and sometimes avalanches.

The life of the spirit demands stamina, spiritual conditioning, and courage. Let us be frank with children and young people about this, certain that they will respond when properly challenged.

To assist them in such spiritual conditioning we need to show them the many sources of spiritual strength—in nature, in people, in books, in prayer and worship, in music and art, and in service,



letting them discover those which speak best to their condition.

Furthermore we need to provide as many opportunities as possible for them to develop responsibility, standing by when we are needed. In their spiritual life as in their physical development, children have to learn to walk and then run, themselves. Our job is to help them to learn that they can walk spiritually and not be weary, run and not be faint.

They likewise need to know that there is evil in the world, but that it is possible to live above it as George Fox testified in his classic statement that:

“I saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over the ocean of darkness.”

**7. Joy.** Spiritual maturity should result in inner joy and be reflected in outer happiness. As Quakers we have not valued this trait enough. Too often we have fit Tom Kelley's description of the “dour, sobersides Quaker whose diet would appear to have been spiritual persimmons.”

More of us need to cultivate this aspect of spiritual living, demonstrating in our own lives that there is fun and joy in the life of the spirit.

### **C. A Ten Point Program to Encourage These Values**

To develop persons with these characteristics is an enormous task today. It is so overwhelming that one group of Quakers recently moved to Costa Rica to raise their children in isolation from today's world. A few Quaker groups still exist in the United States which are attempting to rear their boys and girls in closely-knit Quaker communities, comparatively isolated from other people. Other Friends believe that this task can be done best in Quaker boarding schools where the conditions for spiritual development can be better controlled.

But most of our children and youth will be raised in the maelstrom of contemporary society. If they are to become spiritually-motivated, quality Quakers, we must have strong Quaker homes and dynamic, many-sided programs of religious education

in our Meetings and in our Yearly Meetings.

I should like to mention briefly ten types of activities we should stress with children and youth.

### **1. Provide Close Contacts with Contagious Christians.**

The best way to introduce children and youth to the life of the spirit is through close contacts with people who represent the values we have outlined, for much learning is caught rather than taught.

In his autobiographical writings, Rufus Jones refers repeatedly to the influence of his Uncle Eli and his Aunt Sybil Jones. Clarence Pickett has testified to the tremendous influence of the principal of the Quaker Academy he attended, to the professors at Penn College, and of Herman Newman, the editor of *The American Friend*. In the lives of each of us here there are undoubtedly a few individuals who have influenced us greatly.

Are the children and young people in your home and Meeting coming into contact constantly with such persons—in the intimacy of the home, around campfires, in work camp projects and in similar situations where close contact is possible? Are you and I constantly growing so that we can serve as samples of the Society we would like to create?

### **2. Portray the Dynamism of Jesus and Great Religious Leaders.**

In Jesus we have the supreme example of the meeting of the human and the divine. Yet, in almost all of our literature and art he is presented as an effeminate, unattractive person who is weird and strange to children, if not downright repulsive. I wish that we might search together for more effective portrayals of Jesus, create such materials ourselves, or encourage gifted individuals to produce such much-needed resources.

I recall the thrill that came to me when I first discovered Kagawa's *Behold the Man* and Gibran's *Jesus—the Son of Man* and the pleasure that my father derived from finding a picture of Jesus playing tug-of-war with a group of children.

In addition to confronting boys and girls with such repre-

sentations of the dynamic, history-shaking figure of Jesus, we ought to confront them with the stories of many of the great religious leaders of all times, stressing such contemporary figures as Gandhi, Schweitzer, and Kagawa.

Are you doing this now in your home and Meeting? I trust that the answer is "Yes"—or that it will be soon.

**3. Encourage Service Activities.** To those who have studied attitude formation, reinforcement and change, it is clear that people learn best when they are totally involved. Consequently we should be constantly on the alert for activities for children and youth which involve their hands as well as their minds. Wherever possible these activities should be sharing activities rather than merely giving activities.

Are your children and the boys and girls in your Meeting "herding buffaloes" for the American Indians, taking part in the Service Committee's Trick or Treat program at Halloween, participating in week-end work camps, aiding refugee families, corresponding with their peers in other parts of the world, or engaging in similar service projects. If so, fine. If not, is this an approach you need to investigate?

**4. Promote Individualized Reading.** There are publications for children and youth on almost every phase of spiritual living, many of them written by outstanding Friends. Such reading ranges from the Round the World Quaker Letters for Boys and Girls to the novels for children written by Elizabeth Gray Vining, and from the excellent biographies of people like Gandhi and Mary McCleod Bethune written by Catherine Peare to books of Quaker humor like **Quaker Anecdotes and Laughter in Quaker Grey**.

There are likewise recent books about children written by Quakers, including Eric Johnson's **How to Live Through Junior High School**, Harold Loukes' **Friends and Their Children**, and Elise Boulding's **Friends Testimonies in the Home**.

Are many such books in your home library? Are there even more in your Meeting Library? Are they attractively displayed? Are children and young people encouraged to share the results of

their reading with others? And does your Meeting include a sizeable sum for books in its annual budget? All these are "musts" for any program of introducing people to the life of the spirit.

**5. Provide a Variety of Worship Experiences.** Within the Society of Friends in this country there are several types of worship. Some people consider this a weakness, but it can be a strength, for different kinds of people find their way to God in quite varied ways. And all of us can be enriched by different modes of worship.

Our children and youth should be introduced to these varied ways of worship and discover for themselves which are spiritually the most satisfying to them. They should know what it means to worship in the silence of a group. They should experience the beauty of worship through music. They should be exposed to the use of poetry and fine paintings. They should be enriched by stimulating sermons and by reading the messages and meditations of many people.

And they should learn through experience that worship can take place on the shore of a lake or in a grove of trees as well as in a Meeting House or church.

Are the children and young people in your Meeting being introduced to a variety of religious experiences or are they limited and thus stunted in this aspect of spiritual growth?

**6. Depict Vividly the Story of Quakerism.** As Friends we have a glorious heritage. It is filled with thrilling stories, dramatic situations, colorful personalities, world-wide travel, important challenges and responses. Children ought to hear parts of it told by good story-tellers. They ought to dramatize parts of it. They ought to read about it in such books as **Colin Writes to Friends House**, **Caroline Jacobs' Road to the Meeting House** and **Builders of the Quaker Road**, and **Elise Boulding's My Part in the Quaker Adventure**.

They should also know about many of the current activities of Friends here and abroad, sharing in them as much as possible.

Do your children and young people and those in your Meeting

know the story of Quakerism well? Do they feel a part of the great Quaker adventure? It is certainly incumbent upon us to make it vivid and meaningful to them.

**7. Examine Personal and Public Problems.** At every stage of life children and youth are confronted with personal problems. They may be concerned with honesty, with conformity, with boy-girl relationships, with their position on the draft, or with a host of other issues. It is the responsibility of the Meeting as well as the home to help boys and girls and young people to discuss these personal matters with warm, understanding adults. Often it is a help just to know that others have been faced with similar problems and that adults are ready to listen as well as talk.

As they grow older, young people need similar opportunities to thrash out their positions on economic, social, and political problems. Often they should invite persons of their choice to present differing points of view on contemporary issues.

Are you and I the kind of persons with whom children and youth want to share their uncertainties and their problems? Or do they fear that we will be over-critical of their thoughts and dogmatic in our answers?

How well does your home and your Meeting provide for help on personal and public problems? This question merits our careful and prayerful consideration.

**8. Open Up Opportunities for Participation.** More than other religious groups, the Society of Friends depends upon the active participation of its members in all phases of its work. Yet, too often, responsibilities are given only to older friends who are supposedly seasoned, mature, or "weighty". We tend to limit the participation of younger people to singing in the choir, reporting on attendance at conferences, and an occasional Sunday service when the pastor is absent.

We need desperately to find ways in which young people can be included in the work of the Meeting early in their lives. Perhaps a class of young people could take charge of the Meeting Library, with the help of one or more able adults. Possibly young

people could be used often to read the Bible in programmed services. Certainly they should be included in committee appointments, even if they serve as coopted members when they are not yet members of our Meetings.

Is your Meeting making full use of its younger members? Do they feel that they are active, participating members in its decisions? Probably all of us need to devote some attention to this aspect of introducing children and youth to the life of the spirit.

### **9. Utilize Dramatic Experiences and Audio-Visual Aids.**

There is probably no better way to develop a real feeling for the people of other times and places than through dramatics. Often plays can be created in a few minutes by a group and staged without costumes and with a minimum of "props". Sometimes plays can be read aloud by a group without acting them out. Occasionally individuals can be encouraged to write their own short, simple skits for use by a group.

This is a type of activity which can be carried on in homes as well as in Meetings. I recall a home in which I was entertained recently in which there was a curtain across one end of the living room where the children staged their own plays, written and acted out by members of this family and their close friends.

In our Meetings we need to use audio-visual materials more than most of us do. I know one group of young people who were stimulated recently to make a study of the life of Gandhi and of India after hearing the one existing recording of his speaking. In our Brooklyn Meeting a few months ago many members were moved by hearing for the first time the voice of Rufus Jones in a recorded message made shortly before his death.

Perhaps Western Yearly Meeting needs to establish an Audio-Visual Distribution Center of Quaker and related materials.

There are many unexplored possibilities in dramatics and audio-visual resources as we introduce our children and young people to the life of the spirit.

**10. Arrange for Times of Fun Together.** The Meeting group should be like a large family and the Meeting House a home away from home. The members of such fellowships should eat and work and play together as well as worship and study and conduct the business of the Meeting as a group.

In fact worship is often enhanced and group tensions lessened because people have shared in a variety of other activities together. As adults it is well for us to remember that play and fun are essential aspects of living, the more so the younger we are. Having fun together can be conducive to developing the life of the spirit. Writing recently about the Sunday evening get-togethers of a Quarterly Meeting group of young people, Howard Comfort of Haverford, Pennsylvania said:

“I suspect that the inter-Meeting gossip and innocuous games which filled the interval until eight o’clock have had quite as catalytic and consolidating effect as any expositions of the Inner Light and Gurneyism.”

I trust that the children and young people in your home and your Meeting have learned to associate Christianity and Quakerism with fun. Have they?

**Conclusion.** Yes, this is a ghastly time to be alive, and to be a parent or grandparent, a teacher, a church worker or anyone else who works with children and youth. But it is also a great time to be alive and to help introduce children and youth to the life of the spirit.

There are hazards and risks, disappointments and failures for all of us, but there are also great adventures and companionship, inner and outer joy, and triumphs along life’s rugged road.

One of the greatest verbs in life is the verb “to become”. My prayer for all of us is that we will become contagious Christians and quality Quakers, endowed with the strength, wisdom, and understanding to introduce children and youth to the life of the spirit wisely and well so that they may lead lives worth living.