

August 28, 1983

Last week, some of us met to consider the future life of this small worship group, and this morning as I was working to carry out one of the decisions reached—the provision of flowers for the central table whenever the way opened and it was convenient to do so—I asked myself: "Exactly why am I assembling these flowers anyway?" My former experience at Montclair Monthly Meeting came to mind, where it seemed we always had a carefully built and picturesque fire blazing in the fireplace from October through March. The fire was another way of reminding ourselves of the primary Creation.

And in thinking about the reason for these flowers, there came to mind a passage I recently read which was written by Frederick Law Olmstead, the man who designed Prospect Park and Central Park here in New York City, and who also, interestingly, was one of the earlier conservators of Yosemite Valley in California. Writing about landscape, Olmstead said that the reason why we find its enjoyment so uplifting is that our appreciation of a beautiful landscape is an end in itself, divorced from any further purpose, and so it brings us into the present moment in a way which is both relaxing of care and at the same time enlivening of our sense of the glories of the Creation. It occurred to me that these flowers, too, function in the same way here in our meeting. The flowers focus our attention in the present, enlivening it with an object which reflects the glories of the Creation, yet the enjoyment of which is an end in and of itself, beyond human scheming for some future purpose. Thus, they interrupt our habit of living in the past or the future, reminding us that there is no time but this present.

We must also realize that some observers can gaze upon the magnificence of nature in a place like Yosemite Valley, and rather than resting in the present, they can see million of dollars worth of timber to be exploited for the future. And as we well know, flowers such as those which rest so innocently here in our meeting, in the context of courtship can be employed to advance schemes.

When Jesus asked us to consider the lilies which neither toil nor spin, I do not think he was really asking us to become hippies, unconcerned about where tomorrow's daily bread will come from. He was not counseling us to neglect sowing this season's crop so we might eat at the end of the year. But he was suggesting that, like the lilies, we should place ourselves at the service of some larger cosmic purpose which transcends our merely human scheming; that just as all flowers exist to advance the next generation of flowers and not for a purpose solely of their own, and just as, by faithfully doing so they radiate in their fragile and transient natures the glories of the cosmos in many spheres, so we, too, can develop so that our behavior becomes a natural behavior, no longer motivated merely by selfish desires, but as an instrument of the divine intelligence, a fitting vehicle through which the forward motion of the divine plan for the Creation is carried out. As such, like the lilies, we are released from the false muscular efforts which grow out of the agitations of our own egos.

Having gotten these few blossoms together, it was interesting to walk into this room and

confront the overwhelming array of gorgeous flowers bequeathed to us by yesterday's wedding. It is useful to watch the operations of the mind at such a moment, and to see how much like the lilies we really are. And if we feel a sense of deflatedness because our small crumb of service is eclipsed in magnificence by that of another, how shall we withstand the situation which may occur when our greatest heroism is smothered by the anger, greed and assault of others? Can we remain, spiritually, as the lilies of the field?

Each of us is an individual, separate and distinct. Yet if each of us finds our own True way it will express the cosmic purpose, it will radiate something which is common to us all. This is the miracle which makes unity possible, which makes it possible for us to join hands in a circle around the flowers, a circle in which none are crushed or distorted, a circle which is spacious enough to make room for everybody.