

“WHERE IS THE ME?”

Sophia Lyon Fahs was stimulated to take a path that led her to become one of the great innovative liberal religious educators of the twentieth century by a sudden question by her 7½-year old daughter Ruth in 1914 — “Mother, Where is the *me*? It seems to be always my *hand*, my *foot*, my *head* or my *skin*, but where is the *me*?”

It was a profound question. Fahs had studied an open approach to the questioning child in religion, but her studies had not prepared her to answer her daughter’s question. She appreciated her daughter’s dilemma.

“Your leg cannot think, can it?”, she asked Ruth.

“No,” said Ruth, “It is my brain that thinks but where is the *me*?”

“Your brain cannot love,” said her mother.

“No,” said Ruth, “but it is my heart that loves. Where is the *me*?”

“We speak of the heart as loving,” said Mrs. Fahs, “but it is really not the heart; it is only the *me* that can love and be kind”

“But, where is the *me*?” said Ruth

“I don’t know,” her mother said. “I only know that we each have a *me*.”

Sophia Lyon Fahs did not have an answer, and perhaps the question could not be adequately answered.

Four years later in 1918, Ruth burst out with the same question again: “Where is the *me*?” Both had remembered the question from years before, and Ruth was still searching for an answer. Soon she recited to her mother a poem composed in her mind:

Where is the really, really me?
I’m somewhere. I know, but where can that be?
I am not my nose, nor my mouth, nor my eye.
And I’m not my feet, nor my legs, nor my thigh.
I’m not my hand, nor my arm, nor my hip.
And I’m not my teeth, nor my tongue, nor my lip.
I’m sure I’m not my elbow nor knee—
Oh, where am I? Oh, where can I be?

Ruth was struggling with how to think about the mystery of her real self, of things that are real but intangible and invisible. The “real *me*” might be one’s soul, but that just begged further questions. Perhaps the big questions need to be left as questions to ponder and not be defined within a rigid and narrow box of ideas. Perhaps, then, religious education should not presuppose specific answers, but be broad and open. Perhaps a thoughtful response to some of the most penetrating questions in religion is: “I don’t know.” And this wondering and pondering approach to religious education became the basis for Sophia Lyon Fahs’s seminal series of books of religious education, *Martin and Judy*, used by generations of children in Unitarian and Universalist church schools.

Ref: Edith Hunter, *Sophia Lyon Fahs: A Biography* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 117-118.