



# Learning By Heart Sophia Lyon Fahs

By Polly Peterson

"Mama, Mama, why do we just keep going and going and not going anywhere?" asked little Sophia. Her family was crossing the wide Pacific Ocean on a big ship bound for America. Sophia Lyon was an American girl, three and a half years old, making her first trip to America. She and her older brothers and sisters had all been born in China where their father was an evangelical Christian minister and their mother had started a school for Chinese girls.

When they made that the long trip to America in 1880, Sophia's parents thought their family would go back to China after one year. But the plans changed, and Sophia never returned to China. As she grew up, her memories of China grew dim. But she hoped when she grew up she could go to other countries as a Christian teacher, like her parents.

In college, Sophia joined a club for young people who also wanted to become Christian teachers. She met another devoted volunteer named Harvey Fahs. They began writing letters to each other, and made plans to travel and teach together. Six years later, they were married. But instead of traveling to another country, Sophia and Harvey moved to New York City. Harvey had a job, and Sophia Lyon Fahs taught Sunday school and continued her studies, excited about the new ideas she was learning.



## CHALICE LIGHTING "Gandhi Peace Greeting"

**I offer you peace.** (HANDS UP, PALMS FACING AWAY FROM YOU)

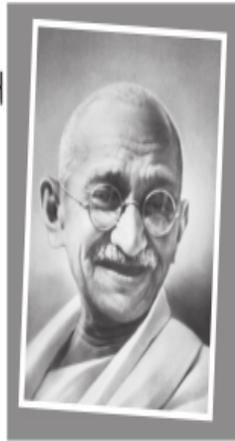
**I offer you friendship** (BOTH HANDS CLASPED IN FRONT OF YOU)

**I offer you love.** (HANDS CROSSED OVER HEART)

**I see your beauty.** (FIRST COVER BOTH EYES WITH HANDS AND SLOWLY UNCOVER THEM SO TO SEE)

**I hear your needs.** (CUP EACH HAND BEHIND EACH EAR)

**I feel your feelings.** (CROSS BOTH ARMS OVER CHEST AND REST HANDS ON THE HIGH CHEST)



**My wisdom comes from a Higher Source.** (BOTH HANDS, PALMS UP REACHING UP)

**I honor that Source in you.** (BOTH PALMS TOGETHER AS IN NAMASTÉ AND HEAD SLIGHTLY BOWED)

**Let us work together.** (BOTH HANDS CLASPED IN FRONT OF YOU)

Sophia and Harvey's first child was born in 1904. In those days, many women gave up their outside work after they became mothers. But Sophia was determined to keep learning and to keep teaching Sunday school, and she did. As it turned out, being a mother also helped Sophia learn! She learned about children from being with her own children and listening to their ideas and questions.

When her children asked questions, Sophia tried her best to answer them. Her children had very interesting questions, like "Where does snow come from?" and "Where are we before we are born?" As she tried to answer her children's questions, Sophia learned how much she did not know! You might think not having all the answers took away Sophia's faith, but it was the opposite. She started to believe that to have a strong faith, finding questions you really care about is just as important as finding answers.

One time when Sophia taught a religious education class, she told a lively story about a real person who had been a Christian teacher in another country. The children were eager to hear the story and eager to talk about it. Like her own children at home, the children asked questions — the interesting kind of questions that let Sophia know they were thinking and learning.

Sophia's ideas about religion changed over time. As a young person, she had thought Christianity was the one true religion

and people all over the world should learn Bible stories. She grew to realize the Bible was not the only book with truth in it. She collected stories from all over the world, filled with truth and beauty to help children's spirits stretch and grow. She published the stories in a book called *From Long Ago and Many Lands*.

In those days, when most adults thought children's minds were like empty jars to fill with learning, Sophia thought differently. She thought children were more like gardens, already planted with seeds of possibility for learning and growing. She thought a teacher's job was to provide the good soil and water and sunlight a garden needs to grow. In religious school, a teacher could help children grow in their spirit and faith.

When Sophia Fahs wrote about her beliefs, the president of the American Unitarian Association was impressed. He asked her to talk to Unitarian religious educators — people such as Adrienne Summerlot and Emily Manvel Leite. Unitarian Sunday school teachers liked her ideas very much. And that is why, when you come here, we encourage you to see, and touch, and do ... and to ask lots of questions.

When she was 82 years old, Sophia became a Unitarian minister. Her own life was a great example of her belief that every person in a congregation should continue to learn and grow, from the smallest child to the oldest adult. Sophia Fahs lived a long, long time — 102 years — and she never stopped learning new things.

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Or maybe your journey feels more like a tree with deep roots

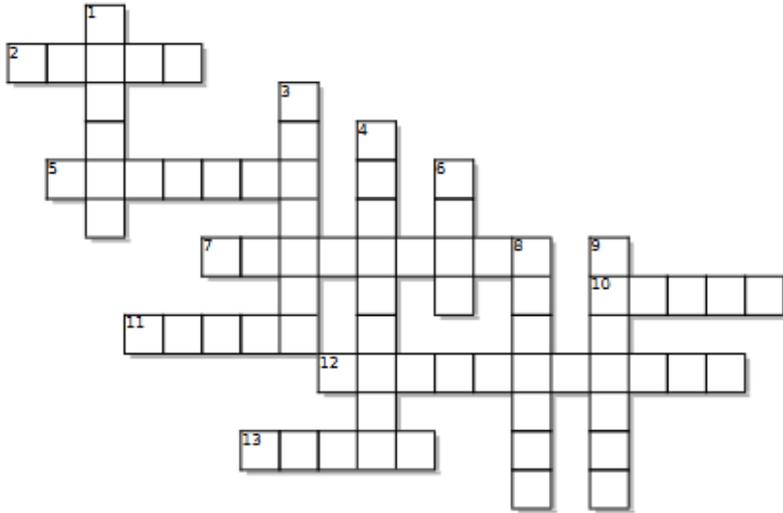


Or a mighty river



# Sophia Lyon Fahs

use the story to help you answer this puzzle



## ACROSS

- 2 Being a mother helped Sophia \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 A \_\_\_\_\_ can help children grow in spirit and faith.
- 7 When you come here, we encourage you to ask lots of \_\_\_\_\_.
- 10 Sophia's \_\_\_\_\_ about religion changed over time.
- 11 Her book was called "From Long Ago and Many \_\_\_\_\_."
- 12 Sophia thought \_\_\_\_\_.
- 13 She and her older brothers and sisters had all been born in \_\_\_\_\_.

## DOWN

- 1 Sophia married \_\_\_\_\_ Fahs.
- 3 Sophia thought children's minds were like \_\_\_\_\_, already planted with seeds of possibilities.
- 4 She became a \_\_\_\_\_ minister when she was 82 years old.
- 6 She believed that every person in a congregation should continue to learn and \_\_\_\_\_, from the smallest child to the oldest adult.
- 8 She collected \_\_\_\_\_ from all around the world.
- 9 Sophia Lyon Fahs was a \_\_\_\_\_ in religious education.

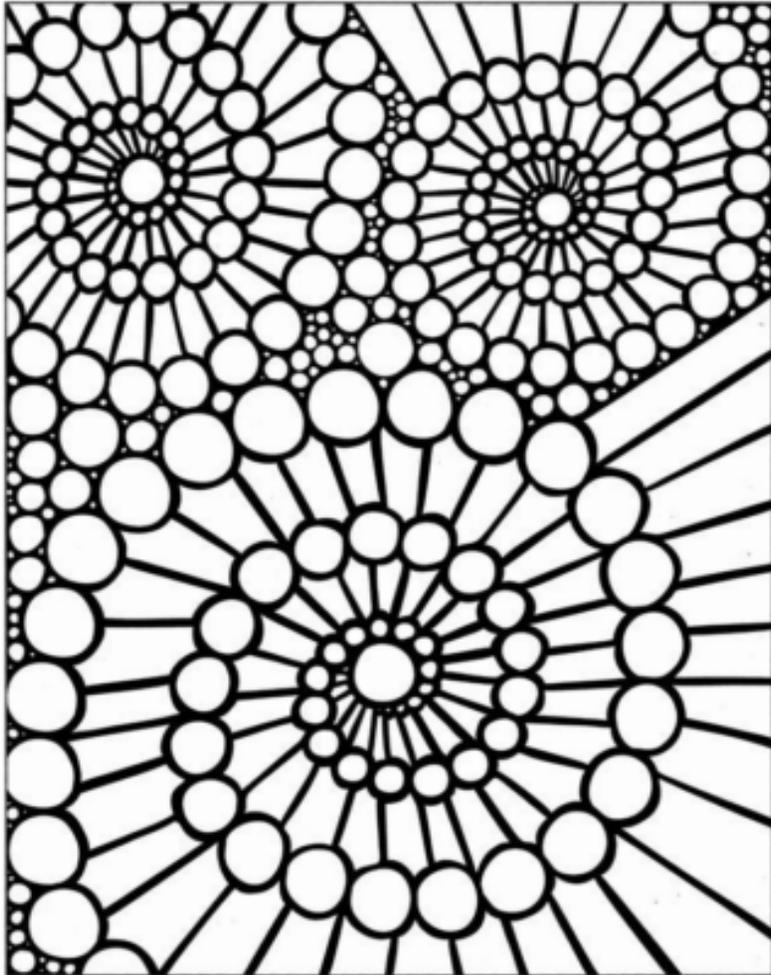
# WORD SEARCH

N F A M I L Y H U C H C H T N  
 L O Q I Y N T O O C Y T W S A  
 I Y I L J G J M I S Z O G I I  
 J C H T N X M Y E E N E N L R  
 V M F E A U Q L V D O G I A A  
 D H R Y N R P Z E Y R A P S T  
 L T T I K I B R A J W R L R I  
 S X T W C K I E E X K U E E N  
 C Y Z N O N F C L Q B O H V U  
 E O I E G R I G M E Y C A I O  
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 P K Z T A S D N E I R F R U V  
 H D I H L O V E S I N G I N G  
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|-------------|------------|--------------|
| CELEBRATION | FRIENDS    | SINGING      |
| CHALICE     | GIVING     | STRENGTH     |
| COMMUNITY   | GROWTH     | UNITARIAN    |
| COURAGE     | HELPING    | UNIVERSALIST |
| FAITH       | LOVE       | WONDERING    |
| FAMILY      | PRINCIPLES |              |

## MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Maybe your journey feels like a spiral



- What have you seen or experienced that made you feel, "Wow, that's really amazing?"
- Have you ever felt really excited to learn something? What was it, and what made it exciting?
- Do you need a teacher to tell you what things are amazing, or is that something you already know? How do you know?
- What do you think "spiritual growth" might be?