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What Canst Thou Say?

Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this: but what canst thou say?
Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest,
is it inwardly from God? —George Fox*

A Covenant with Creation

Eat Mangoes While You May

Lisa Rand

Driving down Highway 1, as I passed through California's Salinas Valley, I felt a choking lump in my throat. Between the highway and the ocean was a collection of little shacks, and I could see workers moving amidst the rows of strawberries. That morning I had ordered coffee at a shop that also sold fruit smoothies, and the fruit surely had come from these fields. Those fields were likely full of pesticides, as strawberries are one of the most heavily treated crops. The contrast between the beauty of the ocean just beyond the fields and the labor-intensive work to gather food was disconcerting. Likewise, even on my low-budget trip, the luxury of zipping down the road on vacation while other people picked my food left me feeling disturbed.

Most of us are on vacation *all the time* from the production of our food. The strawberries are shipped across the country, and the consumer chooses the package with the prettiest fruit for the lowest price. I find it harder and harder to do this. More frequently, I think of the disturbing descriptions offered by Helena Maria Viramontes in her novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*, of the hard life endured by migrant fruit pickers, and the negative health impact of pesticides. When our fellow humans, the air we breathe, and the soil of our

planet are put at risk by food production methods, buying food without concern for its origins feels immoral.

As I have tried to be more mindful of the sources of my food, I realize I am not always mindful, fully present with all my senses, during the preparing and eating of my food. One of the most satisfying food experiences for me is baking bread, and it is partly because of how intensely present I am during bread creation. I reflect on the

Hindu custom of prasad, of offering the first bite of food to the Divine and its particular manifestations in household deities. This moving custom offers a potent example of the importance of pausing before we eat, and of acknowledging forces greater than ourselves.

In order to bring another layer of mindfulness to my mealtimes, I have begun a regular practice of saying grace before meals. Sometimes this grace is said aloud, particularly so I

From the Editor:

My lifelong calling as a keeper of the spiritual hearth has been expanded to a call to help others to listen to the cries of the Earth, bear the pain of what we would hear, and respond to the rampant environmental crisis all around us.

Thus it seems natural to invite the community of What Canst Thou Say? to consider our covenant with creation, to share what we are hearing when we listen deeply, to explore how God may be touching our souls in a time when the Earth may be dying around us. The articles in this issue reveal that the Earth is, indeed, speaking and one by one we are learning to listen and respond.

As we read, dear friends, I pray that each of us might hear anew and help our communities to enter a new and life-filled covenant with the Earth.

With this issue I take leave of my role as editor of What Canst Thou Say? to open time to respond more fully to the voice of the earth.

Patricia McBee, Editor

can invite my young daughter to participate. Most of the time, the grace is said silently. The words are not set, but my prayer is something like this:

Thank you to the sun, rain, and soil for nourishing this food.

Thank you to the workers who planted, tended, and picked this food.

Thank you for my good fortune to have access to fresh, clean food.

May this food nourish my body in order that I might serve in return.

May all those who are hungry find food on this day.

I feel the difference on those days when I rush through my eating and forget to say grace. I always feel regret afterwards.

Last year, I noticed that my prayer was having a surprising effect upon me: when I was in the grocery store buying produce, I felt tears running down my cheeks. My heart was breaking over the effects of large-scale farming practices. I felt deep sorrow that, in the name of profits, companies were using pesticides that poison the Earth, poison the soil, poison the water, and poison the people who labor on the land. I felt deep sorrow that many shoppers were unaware of the condi-

tions in which their food was produced, and then anger that so many people were struggling financially; they could not afford the higher food prices. The layers of injustice and the layers of damage to Creation astonished me. I wiped my tears, chose the one locally-grown fruit that was available, and went home.

My cheeks still wet, I approached my spouse and declared, "We must have a vegetable garden. Yes, I hate yard work, but we must grow some of our own food." My words were unplanned and powerful, as a message out of the silence in meeting for worship. He nodded slowly, taking in the stricken look on my face. The next morning, I found a packet of swiss chard seeds by my place at the table.

I did not hold any illusions that my gardening was giving higher wages and better living conditions to workers. I began growing vegetables because my heart would not stand for anything else. I wanted to minimize my complicity in some small way, and also offer an example by my way of living. Each time I spoke to others about my garden, I had an opportunity to give my reasons.

When I visited a local farm stand last summer, I mentioned my sadness at the conditions of agricultural workers. The farmer, an acquaintance of mine, was happy to report that her workers were teens and they were paid as they would be at other jobs open to teen workers. At the weekly farmer's market near my home, I noticed that these small farmers shared the labor with their families.

Buying local food and growing your own becomes an important issue of faith and practice in a world where our food often has a severed web of life. The fields are owned by corporations, the water is piped in from afar, and the fuel for transport comes at the price of wars. My choice to grow food and buy local as much as possible gives me some small healing.

However, I still have a mango problem. Mangoes are not only my favorite *fruit*, but my favorite *food*. I don't feel ready to give them up. And I live in Pennsylvania—not a place where locally grown mangoes are for sale! I accept that I am making a trade-off: because of the fuel costs, I will try not to buy strawberries from California or apples from South America; mangoes I will buy. To address the condition of all workers, I must be sure that my choices do not remain personal, but that I reach out to others, including advocacy organizations, and try to make a difference.

I'm trying to live faithfully. One day, I might feel led to give up those mangoes. In the meanwhile, I feel profoundly grateful that my sorrow does not paralyze me. My faith gives me a small measure of light, and I will take these small steps with the intention of healing Creation, our connection to one another, and to the soil that nourishes us.

Lisa Rand writes on a small organic farm in southeastern Pennsylvania. She is a member of Unami Monthly Meeting.

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Covenant with the Creator

Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano

It was surreal. Improbable. Heart-rending. The eight-lane, well-traversed EDSA highway (of 1986 People Power fame) that elegantly snakes through Metro Manila was nowhere to be seen. Instead, swarms of people were panicking in slow motion, running helter-skelter for their lives; pitiful luggage and children on their backs or heads, in waters that were fast approaching their waists, chests, necks. With winds lashing behind them and cars tumbling over in the background, it looked like a movie yet-to-be-made of Noah and the Flood or an Asian version of "Waterworld." I sat horrified before the television set and cried, "Lord, have mercy!"

Typhoon Ondoy, with international code name Ketsana, left a wide swath of devastation and lingering despair in my country. Hundreds of lives were lost and billions-worth of property and livelihood disappeared with the reeking standing water that soon turned to goopy mud. Then, no sooner had we gathered our wits around us, another howler, Pepeng (international code name Parma) created havoc and terror in the Northern provinces of Luzon, bringing landslides and burying houses, animals and people as well as flooding the rice plains. Then, another typhoon...

It is too much, Lord, too much, please forgive us!

Mercy and forgiveness. This is my prayer nowadays, as my way of reiterating my covenant with my Lord Creator in relation to his creation. "Climate change," "global warming," "natural degradation" are words being bandied around as if these phenomena just appeared from the mist without us humans having anything to do with them at all. In truth and in fact, we have everything to do with them.

Typhoon Ondoy would have not caused such massive flooding if the rivers' catch basins that run along the cities of Metro Manila were not converted to posh subdivisions by greedy developers with the connivance of government officials. Waters would not have reached the first or second floors of residential/business houses, if only local governments were cleaning up their canals and *esteros* assiduously. Canals and waterways would have not been so terribly clogged if every household observed proper waste disposal, and the millions of commuters put their trash into trash cans and not on the streets. Landslides would have been averted if illegal loggers, who are for the most part rich political kingpins in their provinces, were put in jail or fined

heavily; they would vow to themselves not to cut any tree again. But...so many ifs, so short-lived our memory.

Forgive us, Lord. Help us tread the land in a holy way.

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him" (Psalm 24:1, NLT) summarizes the truth that any covenant I have to make is with the Lord-Maker-Creator of this earth and not with his creation. The more I know Christ in my spirit, the more I become aware that his hands have designed every shaking leaf, and I hear his voice roar in the howling of winds in typhoon-filled nights. And, if I look well enough through the sunlight or through the mist, I may have a glimpse of his face. With this awareness of

Relationship with the natural world?

Mary R. Hopkins

*I discovered Earth as my Great Mother
Creatrix and Provider.*

*Awakened to Her seasons and relationship to the Universe
In which we dance*

*I became conscious of my role as Woman
Creating new life in my womb.*

In death our caskets and tombs

Become symbols of sterility and fear.

I became willing to join my body to Hers

Directing that I be put naked in my grave

Returned to Her from whence I had just come.

Unified in body and spirit, I enrich myself.

Mary R. Hopkins is a member of Kendal PA Friends Meeting. She authored the Friends General Conference pamphlet, "Dynamics of an Unprogrammed Meeting for Worship," and was one of the first subscribers to *What Canst Thou Say?*

being part of his wonderful, awe-full creation, I begin to feel responsible for the other parts—land, trees, air, water, animals. We belong together, for we are lovingly made.

My husband and I live on 2.47 acres. We have a covenant with the Giver of this goodly gift to take care of it. We did away with chemical fertilizers and opted to grow organically our fruits—papayas, pineapples, lime, mangoes, avocados, bananas and exotic ones like *rambutan*, *duhat* and *lansones*. We do not cut any living tree, unless very necessary. Friends, strangers and neighbors agree our place is the coolest area around here. With unscreened, iron-grilled wide-open windows (even at night and unless a typhoon is around), we get a constant cool breeze, occasional fireflies at night, some visiting geckos, a few misdirected birds, and mosquitoes, too. But we solve the last by putting up mosquito nets when we sleep.

Plastic bags and other plastic containers are shamelessly scattered everywhere in this country. I minimize using them in our household by recycling and segregating. I also made a vow to God to keep my stretch of the road free from candy wrappers, plastic bags and other non-biodegradable stuff carelessly thrown by passersby. School kids, who seem to be taught cleanliness and proper garbage disposal at school only, and not a few adults, have no qualms of conscience about disposing of these on the road. As I hike on this stretch every day, I pick up every bit of plastic I see. “Why are you doing that?” an acquaintance asked me. “You never know,” I replied, “more of these will flood us someday, like in Metro Manila.” She shook her head, quite unbelieving. We live in upland Cavite, on a hill at that. *How could it happen*, she must be thinking. People seem to be catching on; less plastic stuff litters our road nowadays. Where they are throwing it now is a cause of concern to me.

What Canst Thou Say?

We have to love and respect one another as God loves and respects us to the day when he will join us with his everlasting Presence and remove all our sorrows. No more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever. (Revelations 21:3)

Until that day, I hold hands with our century-old gnarled mango tree.

Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano is a writer from the Philippines. She realizes the importance of growing into a new serenity of mind and spirit that is Christ-centered and a new nobility of character and conduct that includes God's whole creation, which to her mind is shared by WCTS friends. Her writing appeared in the WCTS Bread and Roses issue.

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**Prayer of the  
World**

*Kathleen Maia Tapp*

I've written all my life—first children's novels, then a shift to poetry and essays. During a time when my spiritual life was opening, deepening and filled with energy, my dreams sent gentle messages that there would be another shift—and it would be about 'writing the earth.' I wasn't sure what that meant. I felt strong nudges to let my writing deepen. I went on re-

treat. There were many frustrations. I couldn't seem to open. I asked to stay another day. At the end of that day, I sat watching the sunset and trying to write, and then there was a shift, and it began to feel as if the sunset was writing me.

It was the voice of earth, stone, sea, wind, and the Mother of all speaking through creation, speaking of the web of life and the great strain on it, speaking of the deep and desperate need for prayer—an expanded meaning of prayer: “listening softens the fortress that guards the heart. When the heart softens, that is prayer. ... the web of life is strengthened hand by hand, heart by heart, prayer by prayer.” She also spoke through the colors of the rainbow; each color holding its own meaning. “The White Light of Love bends through the prism of itself and pours down color.”

I felt overwhelmed by this writing. I participated in a women's pilgrimage to the sites of the Mother in Mexico, to learn more and to ask for help. Although I wanted to move ahead with sharing the writing, I felt fear and inner resistance. With support from mentoring Friends, I applied to the Way of Ministry program. The affirmation and support in this Spirit-filled program helped me shed my fear. I was surprised to find it replaced with...joy...

While I'd been writing, my hus-



Ken Tapp

## For Jdimytai Damour

Steve Kohn

*Each action ripples out as Indra's net.  
Each network borne by what has been before  
Sow sewage in the stream—incur a debt.  
Reap pestilence, extinction, famine, war.  
We neo-Neros fiddle. Home is burning.  
The fire this time, the pyre, apocalypse,  
Shrinking polar ice cap bears—our warning.  
Carbon life and death—ecocollapse.  
Relax. Each mass extinction had survivors  
Within our species sum will get to choose  
Which be all end all stuffs to lust for, die for.  
Descendants will write histories vesting views.  
Apophis, magma, earthquakes—not our choices  
“Had we known.”*

*We do.*

*Raise your voices.*

**Steve Kohn** practices Vipassana Buddhism in Highland, New York. He is learning to savor the richness of sadness over the blindness of anger.

band, Ken, had been deeply involved in his own spiritual practice which was/is nature photography. We paired his luminous photographs with the Prayer of the World poetry, creating a presentation where his photographs moved across the screen while I read the poetry. And we discovered, as one Friend said, “Pairing the two media made each more transparent to that which is behind both of them.” We found we had both opened to the same message.

Ken and Katharine Jacobsen, also involved in Way of Ministry program, have provided holy accompaniment and practical help in moving forward with this presentation, as have peer groups and care committees. Ken Jacobsen “listened” for a song of “Prayer of the World” and composed a beautiful, spirit-filled song. Peggy O’Neill, who teaches and leads sacred dance, is now “listening” for how this can be danced. Many are helping to raise this prayer of the world.

My husband and I continue on our “Earth Word Pilgrimage”. Over the *What Canst Thou Say?*

past few years we’ve traveled to many places, including the Grand Canyon, the Everglades, and the Medicine Wheel in Wyoming. We’ve gone to the Smoky Mountains, the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River, and Pendle Hill. We just returned from the tundra in northern Canada. I have traveled to Ireland and Iona. At each place there is a ‘teaching’.

I like the thought that perhaps earth is holding a Meeting for Worship; the messages coming from different sites all contribute to the whole message—how to open the heart, heal the web, join the prayer of life, help earth move into a new day, a new dawn. It is a message, ultimately, of love and hope:

*...I lay you in the manger of a New Day  
and I will guard your growth with love,  
and I will give you the song  
of the stars, seas and stones,  
the tales of the winds  
to guide your growing days.*

**Kathleen Maia Tapp** is a pilgrim-poet and a former editor of WCTS.

## Consciousness and Creation

Teri Degler

In the late 1980s North America I seemed to wake up to the environmental crisis for the first time. I was commissioned by a large Canadian publisher to collaborate on writing a book for young adults with an environmental organization called Pollution Probe. The result, *The Canadian Junior Green Guide*, came out in 1989 and became a Canadian bestseller.

I was thrilled with the book’s success. But beneath the joy and excitement, something much darker lurked. At some level I was afraid the burgeoning enthusiasm for everything green was merely another passing fad.

In spite of all the buzz and excitement about the book, I started to become depressed. Adding to this sense of despair was the sheer weight of the knowledge I’d gained while researching the book. Things were much worse for our planet than even a long-time environmentalist like me had known.

In some ways, being immersed in this bleak information made me more committed to activism than ever. In other ways, it was all too much. I simply couldn’t bear it. And even more distressing: I could see that the massive media blitz on the environment wasn’t making people change. A trip to the grocery store showed that something as simple as bringing a reusable bag—undoubtedly the easiest, least inconvenient way in the world to make a big environmental impact—was beyond the vast majority of us.

At the same time, I was becoming known as an environmental spokesperson and was being interviewed frequently in the media. What’s more, I was being asked to speak at conferences and, halleluia, getting paid for it. This was very significant for me, because it is extremely difficult for authors of non-fiction who live in a

small population country like Canada to make a living. The exception to this comes when an author writes almost exclusively on one particular topic and becomes known as an authority on it. Suddenly, this was happening to me and, almost unbelievably, it was happening in a way that might allow me to fulfill my dream of making a real impact on environmental issues.

I found myself wavering between the kind of hope I'd feel when I'd speak at a school and see eager little hands wave in response to questions like "What can *you* do to save the environment?" and the abject hopelessness I felt when I would get home and have to face another scientific abstract on the effects of ozone depletion.

Slowly, the hopelessness was beginning to win. As it did, I turned increasingly to my other great passion, researching the lives of mystics and the divine spiritual force that triggered their mystical experiences. Depending on the spiritual tradition these mystics came from, they gave this spiritual force names that ranged from Holy Spirit and Sophia to *dumo fire*, *jeng chi*, and *kundalini-shakti*. But I soon discovered that, regardless of what these great spiritual teachers *called* this force, what they experienced was astonishingly similar: From George Fox to St. Paul, they all described having visions of light, sensations of divine



Paul Healy

love, and an unshakable certainty that they were in some way united with the Divine.

Often they even described their experiences using remarkably similar imagery. Thus, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Christian visionary St. Hildegard of Bingen would describe an experience associated with the Holy Spirit saying, "*...the heavens were opened and a blinding light of exceptional brilliance flowed through my entire brain. And so it kindled my whole heart and breast like a flame...*" And Panchastavi, an 8<sup>th</sup> century yogi, would describe the awakening of *kundalini-shakti* as a light like a billion suns that glowed in "*the crown of the head like the luminous white shine of the moon, and in the heart like the never setting splendid sun.*"

About this time I had a mystical experience of my own that changed everything. Because so much of my research and focus had been on yoga and other Eastern traditions, I thought of it as a kundalini experience. It occurred one morning while I was attending a spiritual conference in California. Just before dawn broke, I went out onto the beach to do Tai Chi. With my eyes focused on the horizon, I began to move slowly through the set of positions. By the time I got to the flowing movement known as "Wave Hands Like Clouds", something in my perception began to shift. The line separating sky and water began to dissolve. Sky and water became one, the water became one with the sand, and slowly all boundaries, all lines of demarcation dissolved. Suddenly, I could see, actually physically see, that all edges were illusion. Everything that had once appeared to be separate was in fact One—one vast, limitless expanse of pulsating life energy. Intense sensations began to rush through my body, and my heart exploded with love for this Oneness and everything it contained.

Somehow I managed to maintain my focus and finish the Tai Chi set. But there was so much of this light-filled energy moving through my body, I had to run. I began to jog along the narrow, sun-bleached board walk that wound

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# Covenant

Carol Bosworth

through the grass above the dunes and up into the pines. Everything I saw, every rock and grain of sand, glowed with a radiant light. The green of the dune grass had become luminescent; the needles on the pine trees seemed to vibrate with a life of their own; the very air seemed to be filled with a life-giving force. This light, this radiance pulsed through every single thing I saw; it pulsed around me and through me. It was part of me; I was part of it, and I was part of everything.

This experience brought me to a crossroads in my life. I realized I could continue being an environmental writer and probably have some measure of financial security doing it. Or I could come out of the spiritual closet, so to speak, and write books about mystical experience. Once I did this, I knew that many people who were important to me—especially publishers, editors, and fellow writers—would no longer think of me as a serious writer; they'd see me as yet another new age flake.

Yet this was clearly the path I was going to have to follow. It seemed, ironically, that I was going to have to give up focusing directly on environmental issues to do the best work I could for the environment. Even though I believed, and still believe, the work environmental activists do is critically important, my job was to write about spiritual experience and the transformation of consciousness—the transformation that allows individuals to see that we are all One with each other, with all living beings, and with the earth itself.

*Teri Degler's latest book, The Divine Feminine Fire: Creativity and Your Yearning to Express Your Self, which focuses on the relationship of Sophia, Shakti, and Shekinah to our desire both to express ourselves creatively and do good in the world, is now available from Dreamriver Press. <teridegler.com>. [A review of Teri Degler's book will appear in an upcoming issue of WCTS.—eds.]*

Covenant is a special agreement between two parties regarding their present and future relationship and expectations. It is a commonly used word in our religious heritage as recorded in both the First and Second biblical testaments. There, the covenants are between humanity and the Divine Being of the Universe. As a Christian Quaker, I remember the biblical covenants to be these, in summary: “You are my people and I am your God. Be not afraid, for I am with you.” (God tells us this in the First Testament.) And, “This is my body and my shed blood; remember me and the love I have given you.” (Jesus told us this in the Second Testament.)

What can these covenants mean to me now in my daily life as a human being, as I learn more and more about the damage our present lives have caused to each other and to the Earth? What part of these covenants applies to those having any faith or none, no matter where they live on earth? Especially, how can they help us find wisdom and courage to respond to the challenges caused by our greed, mindless consumption, and wars?

When I am afraid, fearing a variety of disasters or being lost, I remember God's promise, “for I am with you,” and I see this presence all around me. All living beings are my companions. We are together in this time of disruptions and unknown changes. We are all held in the same covenant, in the relationship that bears us up. Sometimes I don't see this so clearly, and I continue to fear, or I fall away into old patterns of consuming greed or of violence. Even then, the covenant holds me. The earth holds all of us, and all of us share moments of fear and failure of our response to our part of the promise in covenant. Then I am called to be aware when I have failed,

to remember God's love for us all no matter what, to sorrow deeply for my failures so that I am willing to change, and to pick myself up and begin again.

1) I am part of a community. Together, we remember who we are and what we are to do. We have stories, songs and prayers to guide us in dark nights.

2) I experience what happens when I pay attention to the Other, and to what is happening around me. Paying attention must be learned over and over, and it has power to guide me and to expand my resources, companions, and understanding. These are ingredients of love.

3) Together we help each other open up to new responses, new ways of behavior and new attitudes. Together we encourage growth of trust and learn ways to put away our fear, greed, and violence.

4) I am learning daily to be grateful for my body (a gift), my communities and my place on earth (my belonging), and all creatures and elements of Earth's living being. In gratefulness I experience growing respect for all others' lives, for all belonging to families and places. As the reality of this giftedness of everything appears before me, I see even the changes and chaos as part of the gifts of reality. I see how I borrow, and how I must return. Very bottom-line, breathe-in-breathe-out elements of each given moment. Each given. One moment at a time. How simple!

Standing in this gratefulness, bathed in love that is greater than fear, I can act as I am needed.

*Carol Bosworth lives in a community setting in Portland, Oregon, and is adjusting to life in a city, and to life in an engaged community. She seeks to ground her life in a small spiritual hermitage practice as well as daily writing. Having recently moved, she presently attends Friends Meetings as a guest, unattached to any one.*

# Our Way Forward

Alicia Adams

Six years ago I awoke from a terrible dream with these lines repeating forcibly in my mind: “Draw the curtain, dim the light; bid the Cast goodbye.” I was still immersed in the dream: a detailed viewing of the destruction of all Earth life. I reached for a pen and wrote “Night’s Song.” It came as it is here, as fast as I could write it. My grief overflowed in tears. Just when I felt that this dream represented our already-written future, I had another upwelling from deep within. The second poem, “Heart’s Song”, came just as fluidly. This lifted my spirits but—how could we go forward as advised in this poem in the middle of ongoing destruction?

I experience both these poems as coming from the same stream of prophecy we know from our Biblical texts. “Night’s Song” is the voice of a prophet crying “Doom!” Its purpose is to jolt us out of our customary patterns which are leading us into great destruction. Implied in this is that we could have done differently: we brought this on ourselves. What it doesn’t give us is any way to reverse the pattern that we’re warned is destroying us. The Biblical prophets would say “Turn to God!” That is also implied here, but not stated. “Come! Dry your tears—the choice is ours. Live our hopes or die in our fears.”

What can we hope that is powerful enough to turn around our destructiveness? “Heart’s Song” answers this. Its revelation mirrors that which George Fox experienced: the ocean of darkness covered-over by the ocean of Light. There is a promise implied in “Heart’s Song”: we don’t need to do this alone.

That was a few years ago. These poems surfaced again recently as I inventoried what had survived a hard-drive failure. Again deeply affected, I asked our spiritual guides, the Teach-

ers, if they could give us explicit “how to” guidelines for our intention. They replied as follows:

“Start with your relationship with Earth’s physical gift to you: your bodies. When you attune yourself to their nature with reverence, you will no longer act in destructive ways to Earth life. You will heal the inner division, a false one, between your physical selves and your spiritual awareness. Let your healed selves be your pattern for the way forward into reverence for all Life. As you live this, others will also yearn to do the same. The Source of Life is growing you all into beautiful caretakers of your Planetary Parent and its many species. Begin with yourselves. Ask for help. Trust! All else will follow.”

## Night’s Song

*Draw the curtain, dim the light  
bid the Cast goodbye;  
the long run’s o’er, Cast dispersed:  
night is coming nigh.*

*Cast of millions, glittering garb  
dramas flare in every act.  
Beauty? Aye, but horror, too: at the end  
the worst comes true.*

*All struggle ends, all hopes denied:  
all movement stops.  
Our grief’s supplied with ample fuel  
to feed its flame.*

*In vain the Cast calls out the names  
of gods and schemes, embodied dreams:  
abandoned, scorned,  
they now retreat.*

*Man’s hopes die hard but die they do  
with death of all that gave them form.  
Our home, our world, our web of Life  
all slip into the Void.*

*Come! Dry your tears—the choice is ours.  
Live our hopes or die in our fears.  
We wrote the script, we played our parts—  
we broke our hearts.*

*Now we cry for help on high;  
we scream at fate—too late!  
Our Earth, our life, our destinies  
pass through Death’s gate.*

*Man, triumphant, overcomes his foe:  
Nature dies, man’s fate is sealed.  
Earth’s last breath  
our own.*

*Our gods, our plans, can’t save us now  
as Life on Earth takes  
Its final bow.*

## Heart’s Song

*But wait! A voice, an inner voice  
believes it not and cries, “Rejoice!”  
Can this be true, our final hope?*

*“Rejoice with Life!” I hear again.  
“It’s all that lasts. It’s Who  
we are.”*

*Are man’s destructive actions less  
than heart’s small voice,  
than hope’s last gasp?*

*“What cause have we to rejoice,” I cry,  
“when we and all of Earth’s lives  
die?”*

*“What power have we to shift the flow  
of history’s flood -- of death  
of woe?”*

*“Alone, you’ve none,” replies the voice,  
“but others join your Light. Do not  
give power to the Night!”*

*“Lift your eyes! Engage in prayer!  
Let all you are, and say and do  
rejoice in Life!”*

*“Hold steady, true! Be true to that  
which gave you breath: Life Itself  
never rests.*

*“Life’s time is long, and your time, too;  
Life’s forms may die – your grief is real –  
but Life Itself can heal.*

*“Your Light is joined by hearts in awe  
of Life’s great power to shift Man’s  
course  
at this dire hour.*

*“You join the Heart or you kill the  
Dream:  
your choice, your hope, your new  
Life stream.”*

*Alicia Adams is a member of Berkeley Friends Meeting, California, who has been attending Gila Friends Meeting in Silver City, New Mexico.*

## Free and Infinite

Janis Ansell

The tenth query in the Faith and Practice of my Yearly Meeting asks, “Do we endeavor to live in harmony with nature? Are we careful in our stewardship of the world’s irreplaceable resources?” Each year as I hear the query read I face a dilemma, for the answer is neither simple nor easy. I accept, regretfully, that no matter how careful I am, I could be unwittingly depleting the world’s resources despite intentional efforts to do otherwise.

Recently one of those *aha* moments with which God gifts me from time to time opened a new way of seeing the query and what is required of me. There is a resource, freely poured out upon all creation, which cannot be depleted—God’s love. I need only be willing to receive this divine love and allow it to flow through me. To the extent I surrender to being a channel for God’s love I live in harmony with God’s desire that I be a co-creator in the Divine plan. At times creation seems, from my limited human perspective, to be unpleasant, ugly even, akin to suffering and death. When I am willing to experience the totality of the creative process, accepting everything that comes to me as a gift from God, then I live in wholeness even through periods my human understanding would call times of pain, struggle, or death. Realizing that relying on the infinite resource of God’s love is all that is essential. This relieves me of the worry about making a bad choice or doing the wrong thing despite my good intentions. I trust God to guide me in all my actions, including those relating to stewardship of creation. As I allow myself to surrender the details of life to God’s loving guidance, my way of living is changing to match my shifting inner condition. I am conscious of

the food I grow, buy and consume, as well as the amount of fossil fuel used to produce and transport our food. I eat as locally as possible and endeavor to limit consumption of commercially processed foods.

God is leading me and my husband beyond the initial steps we’ve already taken by driving hybrid cars, installing solar hot water, using CFLs and planting a larger vegetable garden. Those steps were a good beginning that we now accept to be only an introduction to what is required of us. Now we are being nudged firmly toward a simpler life of sustainable farming. God is asking us to let go of material goods and to build a smaller, zero-energy house powered by the source of energy God has freely offered us all—the sun. God is asking us to teach others what we are learning and to model a life of simplicity, sustainability and love.

We rest in the Spirit of Love, freely available. We are committed to living faithfully in this covenant relationship with God and God’s creation at Quaker Circle: A Sustainable Friends Community. Today we nurture the vision and

the promise we have heard, and work toward purchasing land and beginning the building and planting. We trust God is laboring with us in ways we cannot yet see to acquire the land and to bring the workers who, like us, can do no less than obey the call to live in Love with Creation.

*Janis Ansell is a member of Rich Square Monthly Meeting (North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative). She completed the School of the Spirit’s program “On Being a Spiritual Nurturer” in 2008 and now serves on its Board. Information about Quaker Circle can be found at <quakercirclesfc.com>.*

## Grants for the Study of Christian Mysticism

The Elizabeth Ann Bogert Memorial Fund makes grants of up to \$1000 for the study and practice of Christian mysticism. Proposals for 2010 are due March 1. For more information contact Miriam Feyerherm at <mfeyerherm@atlanticbb.net>.

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# Please write for *What Canst Thou Say?*

(See instructions for authors on page 6)



*May 2010*

## **Addiction and Grace**

**Guest Editor: Jacqueline Hannah with Mariellen Gilpin**

Sometimes addiction is part of our Spirit work. Do you live in addiction—with God? Did Spirit reveal your addiction to you? How does God help you live one day at a time? Has God shown you what triggers the addiction? Has God helped you when you've blown it—yet again? What spiritual gifts come from your addiction? Tell us your stories of addiction and grace.

Deadline: February 15, 2010

*August 2010*

## **Questioning**

**Guest Editor: Judith Favor with Michael Resman**

In the beginning, God asks Adam and Eve, “*Where are you?*” (Genesis 3:9). The First Question seeks relationship, inviting us into communion. What questions has God asked you? What has been your journey to answer the question? Have you asked God a question, and what was the divine response? How did God’s response come about? How has your relationship to God changed as the result of a question? Tell us about your conversations with God, and what you have learned from them.

Deadline: May 15, 2010

*November 2010*

## **Silence and Music**

**Guest Editor: shulamith eagle with Judy Lumb**

For many people, music is an integral part of worship. Whether it’s shape note singing, shouts of gospel joy, choral-orchestral works involving hundreds of musicians, or simple children’s rounds, many people can’t imagine corporate prayer without song. Quaker traditions for many of us include an important period of silence in our worship, or may even be “waiting worship,” which can be completely silent if no one is moved to speak. How does worship change for you, depending on if you are embraced in silence or carried on wings of song?

Deadline: August 15, 2009

## **What Canst Thou Say?**

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