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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*

## *Prayer (Supplement)*

### *The Strongest Word I Knew*

*Judy Tretheway*

**M**y heart's deep desire was to learn to listen. I had signed up for the year-long training to become a chaplain at our local hospital. Quickly I learned it was not good enough to just listen to people, I was expected to pray with them, for them. I was expected to lead group prayer around the bedside and preside at memorial services.

Oh my, what's a Quaker used to silent prayer to do?

My personal prayers were wordless states of communion where I offered myself up to, and received, the Light. Panicking, fearful of speaking to and for a God we might each know so differently, I was backpedaling and seriously questioning what I had felt was a very strong spiritual calling. I turned to the Great Unknown. I prayed. I pleaded: "God, if you take a form that can hear, hear my prayer. Help me. If you want me to stay and learn this work of a chaplain, teach me to pray. Or else. Or else, I'm out of here!" I was in a deep state of inner turmoil. My prayer lifted straight up out of this spiritual angst. I could not imagine how I could learn to do this thing my peers did without giving it a thought. Desperate, I abandoned the silence and prayed with words, using the strongest word I knew, "Help!"

That night, and for the next three nights, I was taught to pray in my dreams. The first night, after a day of disaster drills at the hospital, I found my dream self up on a table praying with a cafeteria full of terrified parents after a school explosion. I engaged them with simple moving gestures, coaching them to breathe slowly. I guided them with gentle confidence to become calm, and empowered them to send the most powerful healing force of all—Love—to their children in crisis. Together we turned the energy of our fears about the worst that might happen into a force of hope and love, blessing the hospital staff and their children with the healing medicine of God's love. The first essential instruction: turn fear into love.

The next night, I was taught again. This time I was visiting many different people in many different conditions all over the hospital, praying out loud with each of them. The prayers I was offering were the most beautiful poems I could imagine. They were variations of the three pieces of scripture I knew by heart—the Twenty-third Psalm, the Lord's Prayer, and 1 Corinthians 13. Over and over again, using the themes and images and feelings so deeply known by most everyone in our Christian culture, churched or un-churched, I prayed. The prayers took on the tone of a revival in one room and of a lullaby in another, shifting as the needs shifted. The second essential instruction: all I needed, I already knew.

The third night the specifics of the dream faded quickly, but not the essence. All that I needed to know was within me, within them and within the moment we were sharing. The presence of prayer was part of our presence together. I could ask for help from God and from the patients themselves. "How would you have me pray?" "What is on your heart that you would like to pray about?" "Let's pray together, would

#### ***From the Editor:***

*In this issue are stories of the power of prayer to transform the world and those who pray. May they bless and support your inner life.*

*We were blessed with many more submissions than we had room for in the print edition. This Supplement includes those that did not fit into the print version.*

*Mike Resman*

you like to begin?” The third essential instruction: the prayer is found within the Presence.

These three essential dream teachings opened the way into a life as a hospital, then a hospice, and now a prison chaplain. As I learned to listen deeply, I learned to pray deeply. From the listening came the prayers, as together we gave voice to our deepest desires. Hearing each other, the Great Unknown heard us, and from that deepest source of all listening, the prayers flowed forth.

*Judy Tretheway is a member of Sacramento Friends Meeting. She teaches moving meditation (Qigong) and leads worship sharing groups inside California's Folsom prisons and helps with AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) at other prisons. She has a book of poetry from her time as a hospital and hospice chaplain, and a blog sharing stories of her prison calling <judytre@gmail.com>.*



## A Constant State Of Prayer

Mary K. Mallett

Somewhere deep in childhood I remember someone telling me about the concept of prayer without ceasing, which I have adopted ever after. I talk to God or Spirit or Higher Power every day—sometimes in a “best friend” manner that some religions abhor. As a Friend, I feel comfortable in this approach. I have been rewarded my whole life by speaking to God frequently and directly.

One of my first memories of talking to God was the act of addressing my fears. When I was five years old my parents began leaving me home alone, in front of the television, while they went grocery shopping. I was instructed to keep the doors locked, to not answer the door if anyone came, and to just stay, as we say it today, glued to the tube. I was terrified! I rehearsed what I would do if someone broke in. Most of all, I prayed that God

would protect me. In those early days there were no direct verbal responses from God, just the warm feeling of being embraced and protected by my Maker.

During childhood there were numerous fixes I got into that drove me to fearful prayer. Of note was the time that Billy, a child of my age who accidentally locked his sister, Jan, me, and himself in their family's tool shed. I silently prayed, over and over, that God would send someone to rescue us. It was hot in that shed and we had no water or food. Billy finally grabbed a hatchet from among the tools and chopped-chopped-chopped at the wooden door. It was useless. Again, there were no words, but Billy and Jan's mother finally came and released us. Was it God whispering

in her ear that caused her to check the distant tool shed? I am sure it was.

As a seventeen-year-old I was very naive. I was visiting a beach in Clearwater, Florida. So innocent was I that I entered a car with a group of strangers and found myself whisked away to a brush-filled area on the Courtney Campbell Causeway, with only the lapping waves of Tampa Bay as witness to my terror-filled predicament. I was informed by my captors that I was going to be raped, which caused me to begin weeping uncontrollably. I told the men that I was only 17 and that my parents would be looking for me soon. They pointed out that no one could see us from the road beyond the bushes and that they would shoot me and dump my body into the Bay. I literally saw my body floating out there. I literally screamed a question to God—was this to be my last moment on earth? I begged,

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*The warm embrace of a compassionate God comforted me.*

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out loud, for God to rescue me. My captors somehow seemed softened. They whispered among themselves and did something at the back of the car. Then, they ordered me back into the car. They drove me back toward Clearwater Beach, but forced me out in downtown Clearwater. A coincidence? I was directly across the street from the motel where my parents and I were staying. I watched as the kidnap car drove away. They had bent the license plate up so that no one could read the numbers. I went across the street to my parents' room. They were there! As I told them what had happened to me, they rolled their eyes and accused me of making the whole story up. I was filled with mixed emotions. How could my parents abandon me in this horrible circumstance? But, again, the warm embrace of a compassionate God comforted me.

Over all of the many years since then, I have talked directly to God. In words spoken out-loud or with silent prayer, I continue to ask for guidance and help. God has never failed to respond. Sometimes the response is with actual words spoken directly into my ear. But mostly, God's response is a change in events or a feeling of warmth embracing me.

*Mary K. Mallett is a member of Sandy Spring Meeting, Maryland. She discovered Friends through a Quaker work camp in 1964. A member of the Society of Friends since 1976, she became an active member of Sandy Spring Meeting, Maryland, in the 1980s. She has a continuing call to work with intertribal peoples of the American Indian Society of Washington, DC. An intuitive since childhood, she has written for Angels on Earth magazine and What Canst Thou Say.*



## All Life Is A Miracle

Dalton Roberts

I don't know if I remember his exact words but I do know I remember what Einstein said in one of his more beautiful spiritual moments. It was that there are two ways to look at life. One is to see nothing miraculous about it. The other is to see it all as a miracle. I see Einstein as one of humanity's greatest spiritual teachers. He didn't see himself that way and that's one reason he was. Right there is the true definition of a spiritual life. It is seeing it all as a miracle.

I have lived without seeing anything miraculous in life. There's very little excitement in a life like that. You are looking at yourself as a body when you feel that way. If you are see yourself as a body on a spiritual search, you are actually a spiritual being using your body as vehicle.

Al Harvey calls his body his "ride." To say that is not putting down the body. It is the ultimate compliment to say the body is our ride—transportation for a divine being.

When you see all life as a miracle, as Einstein did, it means you can use any experience as an opportunity for growth—the good and the bad.

In fact, it is good to cease seeing it as good and bad because such a view tends to create a judgmental mind. We get so busy classifying everything that comes our way that we do not just experience it simply as living with what is. What is may feel like evil or bad, but any time we are confronted with seeming evil, it is an opportunity for a higher perspective.

That's what the spiritual life is—always looking for the higher perspective. Think back over your life and you will realize that those times you found a higher perspective in a difficult or bad situation are the times you remember as the God-kissed times.

Going through a divorce is not something to seek. But when it happens, you can take one of a dozen or more ways to look at it. When you come to see good mixed in with all the bad, right there is your spiritual high, your pearl in your pain.

I can look back on some of my illnesses and see great spiritual leaps that came from them. If nothing else, they often slow us down, make us think and meditate, and prompt us to open up to Spirit.

Once when I was hospitalized, a Quaker I had never met came into my room and prayed for me because he felt led of the Spirit. I then went to a

Quaker church and experienced silent worship. Since that time silent worship has remained my favorite way. I may not attend a silent worship church but I practice it while watching my birds, or reading, or quietly experiencing the presence of God. I have long since forgotten what my illness was that brought the Spirit-led Quaker brother to my bedside, but I will never forget what a difference it has made in my life.

To the extent that we see all life as a miracle, we will experience miracle after miracle. I don't mean a setting aside of natural laws but an anointing of earth life as a sacred journey.

*Dalton Roberts is singer, songwriter, columnist, and former County Executive in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He enjoys Unity services and Quaker worship. This is reprinted with his permission from Dalton's Column, "My Sunday Journal." IPS features, October 31, 2010.*

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*If we see earth life as a sacred journey, we experience miracle after miracle.*

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# Rainbows Are Real

Dalton Roberts

*You can't touch a rainbow  
but rainbows are real.*

*A rainbow can lift your heart  
on a dull, dreary day.  
How many things have such power?  
Yes, rainbows are real.*

*Become more sensitive  
to the subtler aspects of reality  
and you will not be such a sucker  
for the dense, physical things  
that have us hypnotized.*

*The rainbow is as real as anything can be,  
There's something there.  
You can see it.  
If just one of your senses verifies something  
It is real.  
Sometimes your sixth sense is right on the money.*

*You can't touch a lot of things  
that are as real as a concrete wall.  
Like love.  
If you don't think love is real  
try to take a frightened baby away from its mother  
or a child's hand out of his father's hand  
or try to keep a son from kissing his mother as she dies.*

*Rainbows and love  
have more in common  
than concrete and steel.  
A nuclear bomb can vaporize concrete and steel  
but it cannot faze love.  
It cannot change the colors of a rainbow.*

*By developing a rainbow awareness  
we energize all of our higher senses  
and keep our dull animal attitudes in their place.*

*As we honor rainbows  
and things akin—like love—  
we become more alive  
and find ourselves having  
more powerful experiences.*

*By seeing in our soul  
what is real  
we become more real.*

*Real things  
possess all the power and glory.  
They are the only real magic on Earth.*

**Dalton Roberts** thanks Lama Yeshe for his "The Realness of Rainbows." This is reprinted from Dalton's Column, "My Sunday Journal." IPS features, June 20, 2010.

## **Tell Us Your Stories!**

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# George Blue and the Power of Prayer

Barbara Christwitz

## With Room for Ecstasy

Barbara Clearbridge (shulamith eagle)

*my pen runs dry from letters to You  
shall i instead sing You, dance You?  
at this late hour my neighbors would object  
oh for a home with room for ecstasy!  
with its rude noises, shouts, overturned furniture, derailment  
i could be awake all night  
& asleep all day if celebration requested it  
i could light 47 tapers and turn off the phone  
forget to wash for the 2 weeks of penitence  
& bow to pigs and rocks*

*i could howl with coyotes  
crawl with caterpillars  
spend a whole day watching a pond*

*i could sing to You in many religious languages  
dance different cultures' steps of prayer  
try on pagan rituals*

*i don't know how to worship  
because everyone's too inhibited to let me try  
so i've learned how to ask of You, instead  
and to commune in silence  
to be 24-hour aware  
to love my neighbor, even if it's politically incorrect  
to write to You and wait for Your answer  
please  
teach me how to give thanks  
quietly*

*teach me how to praise You  
to replenish You with me*

**Barbara Clearbridge**, known to F/friends as **shulamith eagle**, is part of Middlebury Meeting in Vermont and Lake Forest Meeting in Illinois. She is the author of *Finding God By Learning How to Pray*, available through her website <FeelingMuchBetter.org>.

On the day George Blue moved in, the air turned foul with profanity. I thought I could stand the vile language if only I didn't have to hear any loud music. No such luck. The beat was so intense that it penetrated the walls of my house like a torpedo, pumping the air with low and vulgar bass much like the sonar waves which beach and kill whales. It reverberated slightly off the beat of my own heart in a way that threatened me with a massive coronary. The percussion made me think of the rat tat tat of machine guns shooting into my living room. (Is that why they call it heavy metal?) While I couldn't make out the lyrics, I caught enough words to know I didn't want to make out the lyrics. As a pacifist, I've marched against capital punishment, but for this guy, I could have made an exception. My vow of non-violence was being sorely tested.

I decided that this noise situation would be my personal test to see if I could put my expertise and theories about loving thy neighbor into practice; after all, hadn't I taken and led my share of conflict resolution programs? Perhaps this was my chance to see if I-statements and empathy exercises work in the real world. How difficult could this be?

Meeting George the first time wasn't so bad. I simply walked over and knocked on his door. He answered; I introduced myself announcing that I had very sensitive ears and his music carried into my yard and home. Surely he would apologize profusely and remedy the situation, but that was not at all what happened. He just stared at me and said, "Okay," and then closed the door. He did turn the volume down slightly, but not nearly enough. The second time I asked him to turn the racket down he was not as congenial, and at some point he informed me of his hearing disability and that he had a right to hear his music as loudly as he wanted to. "This is a free country, Lady," he said. I countered by expressing my right not to hear his music, but he didn't budge, and our conversation went nowhere.

I tried coming up with alternative solutions to this problem, since neither my padded earphones nor straw bale insulation remedied the sound. I investigated Clearlake's noise ordinances; I sent two letters to Mr. Blue's landlord; I wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper trying to drum up support for fighting unwanted noise; I enlisted Lake County Dispute Resolution Services, but Mr. Blue declined to attend the mediation invitation; I considered researching scientific journals correlating sexual impotency to one's preferred volume and choice of music. Perhaps that would sway this man to reconsider, but unfortunately such studies did not seem to exist. Imagine the improvement to our lives if such research existed.

We tried another approach with George, hoping to win him over by coming to his aid. When he needed tools, Edwin would lend him tools. He needed rides and food, so we gave him rides and food. He even said he needed prayer, and we prayed for him like crazy. One would think communication and neighborliness would have solved the problems. They did not. The music was as loud as ever.

Having unsuccessfully tried all I could think of, I gave up my ways and finally resorted to God's. Earthly strategies weren't going to cut it, and now it was time to turn it over, as we say in 12 Step meetings. My holding resentments served neither me nor George. I needed a way to transform the situation. The following prayer was the best I could muster: "God loves you, George. God bless you. And this is a job for Jesus." That prayer became my mantra whenever I could cope no longer.

My surprise was the next day, when I came home to a quiet neighbor-

hood. Soon thereafter, Edwin pulled in with George in our passenger seat. After George parted, Edwin said, "Guess where we were?"

"Where?" I asked.

"We just returned from the pawnshop, where George pawned his stereo speakers."

Never in my entire life had I been so sure there was a personal God who had heard my prayers. I was beside myself with joy. At that point I should have left well enough alone, but I meddled, thus bringing on yet a new problem. I told George

that next time he needed to pawn his treasures, he could pawn them with me for the price of an agreement in writing.

He, in turn, would agree always to turn the volume down whenever I could hear his sounds in my yard or house. He eagerly signed the agreement, and the deal was on.

The first pawn cycle was successful in terms of silence for me and cash for George; however, it was during the second cycle that our home was burglarized and George's items, along with his wife's wedding ring, were stolen. I'll never be able to prove who broke in, but I will always have my suspicions. In retrospect, I should have simply been content with the first of God's miracles and left well enough alone.

A few weeks later George's testicles started hurting.

"My nuts are killing me," he would say while walking around holding his private parts.

He had what is called a case of orchitis, causing him terrific pain. No relief short of surgery was in sight. A

psychiatrist informed me that an orchiectomy, removal of one's testes, often results in anxiety and depression, both of which I observed in George once he had his surgery. Understandably, I didn't see much of George's girlfriend after George's orchiectomy, and wondered if his lost manhood could have led to her departure as well as a rather anxious and depressed George. I pondered such questions as, "Could Jesus' job and George's testes be related? Out of compassion, should I let up on the prayer/mantra?"

Following George's recuperation from surgery, Edwin chauffeured George to the local jail, where George was to serve a three-week jail sentence for an outstanding warrant. The three weeks stretched into three months, which was long enough for me to actually become sympathetic enough towards George to send him a "thinking of you" postcard. During his three-month stint in jail I spent some time with George, because he came out from his jail pod to participate in the 12 Step meeting which I had volunteered to lead. He was robust. Obviously, being off methamphetamines for a time

did wonders for George. He said he'd found the Lord and now he wanted to learn to read so he could read the Bible. I couldn't

help but ponder how it was that George lost his testicles yet found the Lord.

George promised he would walk with me in the fundraiser walk for literacy when he was sprung. He duly kept his promise and together we covered those three miles, talking enthusiastically the whole way. During our conversation he told about his limited upbringing. Street smarts were about all George knew. He had never really been a child, and he learned to fend for

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*Out of compassion, should I let up on the mantra?*

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*There is nothing quite like the gift of a serene soul.*

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himself without any role models anyone would have wanted. I realized that George, like me, survived the best he could with what he had to work with. That momentous joint walk was probably the pinnacle of our friendship, because not long after he got out of jail, George's drug buddies returned, as did his old habits. He relapsed into using drugs. George had apparently lost the Lord, or at least those attributes which one correlates to finding the Lord.

Soon after, George ended up in Nebraska's State Penitentiary for reasons I suspect must have been related to his continued drug use. This, of course, solved the noise problem that had tormented me for so long. But more than the silence and peace of my home, being at peace with others was the greatest blessing. Of all the answered prayers surrounding George, none was better than my losing the death wish towards him. In fact, I genuinely have a soft spot in my heart for George and appreciate the difficult lessons he taught me. There is nothing quite like the gift of a serene soul.

*Barbara Christwitz is a member of Lake County Worship Group, California. She feels closest to God when picking walnuts, riding her bicycle, playing clarinet, singing, and helping older adult students realize they really can understand algebra. She finds Buddhism and daily meditation helpful. The teachings of Jesus, such as The Sermon on the Mount, the social gospel, and taking up the cross, are mainly what she aspires to.*

## Process

Nan George

*i stand and tremble before...spirit  
i tremble in the fear of...  
being seen  
i fear the velvet jackhammer  
boring through concrete  
until perimeter walls are crushed  
interior walls fall  
walls protecting  
the inner sanctum  
crumble  
and then...*

*naked  
i stand  
exposed  
to all that is  
and is not  
and—  
cascading—  
the pain tears  
i have held for ever  
and for all  
tumble  
through me*

*to mingle with  
the tears shed  
by all  
in all time*

*immersed in the  
rip tides—  
the tears  
crash in wildness  
rushing  
sinking  
sliding—  
downward*

*then—a deep sigh—  
and Spirit enters...  
and the tears  
calm  
and there is  
a breathing out  
of healing...  
embracing all  
in the wholeness  
that is  
Love*

**Nan George**, who attends Columbia Meeting in Missouri, finds joy and wonder in the natural world that surrounds her. She takes constant delight in feeding the birds, raccoons, foxes, possums, groundhogs, and any other critters living near her home.

### **Discovering God as Companion: Real Life Stories from What Canst Thou Say?**

Mariellen Gilpin, Editor

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# *All Else Is Afterthought*

*Eric Sabelman*

*Consider prayer, and its central place in your religious life.*

*Not prayers of invocation, or petition, or intercession, or benediction.*

*Not the ritual prayer in which the priest leads the congregation:*

*Not lists of things to ask God for, nor lists of sins you want forgiven, to be paid for by more lists of blessings for which you are grateful.*

*Not even the same prayers said only to yourself.*

*Quakers have dispensed with these prayers in worship, and wisely so.*

*True prayer is less in words and more secret from all but God.*

*There is no need to formulate a prayer like a telegram, that might be misunderstood if the right words are not chosen.*

*Prayer is instantaneous, a message from you to God that has to travel no distance at all.*

*God is within you, and hears before you speak.*

*The prayerful life is not learning to pray, or saying your prayers, but being aware that you have prayed when you have done it.*

*Prayer happens, and all else is afterthought.*

*It is a small explosion within you; the change in your attitude or action are its smoke and dust, impressive, important even, but not prayer itself.*

*You can test this experimentally:*

*The next time you feel a prayer coming on, in response to the beauty of the moon rising, the rain on dry ground, or the greeting of your loved ones, trace back your thought to the moment the prayer began, and you will find it was complete in that instant.*

*No one sees the colors of a sunset or the fog rolling over the hills, and then deliberately says, "How lovely, I think I will offer a prayer of thanksgiving."*

*No, the seeing and the praying are simultaneous.*

*The spoken prayer is an echo, a reflection in the mirror of your mind.*

*To make a seismological analogy, prayer is an earthquake; what follows is an aftershock.*

*In psychological terms, prayer is unconscious; what follows is delayed by the neurochemistry of conscious thought.*

*If prayer were in the realm of physics, the spoken liturgical prayer is Newtonian: linear, orderly, precisely understood, but only an imperfect model of reality.*

*True prayer is described by the quantum theory of spiritual experience: a sudden change of state, an excitation, seemingly random, unconnected to a linear cause, on an infinitesimal scale but magnifiable, of undefined dimension, an atom of Truth, a mystery at the core of the Universe, and at the core of the soul.*

**Eric Sabelman** gave this message in worship on November 20, 1994. He is in the process of publishing a collection of his ministries.

# Primal Prayer

Eric E. Sabelman

*Consider the root of all prayer; for want of a better term, call it "primal prayer," a wordless cry of the soul.*

*We are all gifted with the potential to experience primal prayer, and it can happen to you without warning, when your circumstances tip you into it.*

*(Mary Ann's illness has tilted me toward more primal prayer.)*

*Primal prayer hits you like a blow to the head. You stop whatever you were doing or thinking; you stop breathing; your heart pounds; your eyes fill with tears.*

*Like the brain bouncing inside the skull after being hit on the head, echoes follow the initial shock.*

*The first echo is to pray (in words, or still without them):*

*"O God, protect those whom I most love. Grant them health and healing."*

*The second echo spreads to those whom I do not know so well:*

*"Protect my grandson born of a woman I have not yet met; let him be healthy and safe."*

*"Let all those in this Meeting be filled with love and tenderness for one another."*

*The third echo spreads farther across the world:*

*"Let no one suffer from any of the stupid and cruel things men do to each other."*

*"Let no Israeli be in the path of a missile fired from Gaza."*

*"Let no Palestinian children be home when their house is bombed in retaliation."*

*The fourth echo spreads beyond the realm of men:*

*"Let the trees in Mexico where monarch butterflies winter not be cut down."*

*"Let the condor chicks at risk in the fires of Big Sur be found safe and sound."*

*You think the echoes will never end, but after a day or so they die down, and you can resume your normal life ... except for frequent flashbacks.*

*Primal prayer has given me an appreciation for formulaic prayers—Buddhist loving-kindness meditation, Jewish tefilah, St. Francis' prayer, the 23rd Psalm, the Lord's Prayer—that you can say to ward off or soften the blow of primal prayer.*

*We, as Friends, have agreed to a theology without intermediaries. We recognize the reality of primal prayer, the experience of which supersedes any formula of words.*

*Nobody else can pray it for you; you've got to pray it for yourself.*

**Eric E. Sabelman** gave this ministry in worship July 6, 2008. He is in the process of publishing a book of his ministries.

## We Pray With Our Needs

Alicia Adams

With these words, a new awareness of prayer began to open in Dan and me. Recently they have come alive for us in a new way. We've been involved in a painful and destructive relationship in our spiritual community. How can we make sense of what has happened? Suddenly I remembered the poem that Body-Self gave me two years ago—a key to our liberation from the pattern of human destructiveness.

When Dan and I met, we found ourselves saying, in passionate unison, "I'd give my life to stop the destruction of our world!" We looked at each other in astonishment. Our partnership was formed around this passion. The first lesson we learned was that to give our lives, we needed to live our lives—in alignment with the Will, the Light and the Power of God. We began to pray that we have help to come into this alignment. Increasingly, we were stripped of layers of our superficial identities and our material security. Was this part of the answer to our prayer? Then our ideas of where and how this would happen crumbled. Our latest experience opens yet another layer of our false identification: as members of a spiritual community that adheres to forms, not Spirit. With this, we are challenged to respond to our painful separation from this community as a gift! We discover, through these experiences, the truth of our lives' unfolding pattern. Our prayer life deepens.

For three months, I explored the possible meaning of body prayer. The WCTS issue on that theme was my inspiration. What exactly was "body prayer"? Had I ever experienced it? Do our bodies pray? If so, are we, in our usual consciousness, aware of our bodies' prayers? One morning, as Dan

was preparing our breakfast, I decided to ask "Body-Self" how it prayed. I received more than I'd ever imagined was possible! After much back and forth, with me playing the part of the disillusioned and stressed-out human, I finally gave it all over and said sincerely:

Body, dear body,  
I'm lost and confused!  
Show me the way  
to come home to my Self.

To this, Body-Self responded with the formula for our prayer life, as follows:

We pray with our needs—  
our Needs-Prayer this is.  
In focus we make each need clear.  
We ask these be met—  
we know that they will.  
Our Trust-Prayer we raise  
to the Source of all trust.

We realize our needs  
may be answered in ways unique  
to ourselves and our place.

When each need is met  
we welcome this gift.  
We pray with receiving  
the gift Life is giving.  
Our Thanks-Prayer this is.

Our "below as above"  
we flow out in love, our gifts  
to meet others' clear needs.  
This Prayer-gift of Giving  
is our Life-gift of living!

The needs flow to clearness  
the clearness to asking  
to trust and gift's welcome  
to joy and rejoicing.  
We give out our blessings—  
we pray!

Life's Circle Dance calls us:  
the needing, the clearness  
the asking, the trusting  
the welcome, receiving  
rejoicing and giving.  
Our Song!

Can we welcome this gift and pray with receiving the gift Life is giving? It's hard to welcome pain! Now we see that prayers for specific outcomes can't be answered as we've imagined. Instead, Life supports the life in us. To do this, we need to be stripped of all that impedes the flow of true Life through us. We need to reclaim, as our identity, the gift of Self we've had since birth: Life's gift to Itself of our potential. Our pain comes when we hold on to superficial layers of identity and look for support and approval from others who are similarly identified.

It's unknown territory for us to reclaim the essence of our true Selves. We are praying to have this process clarified. When we face the crumbling of our expectations and crutches, can we pray with receiving the gift Life is giving? Can we welcome Life's gifts even as we experience the pain of loss? More prayer for help is needed here. It will probably take us time to experience rejoicing. Only in looking back over our lives do Dan and I see the necessity for each step in our clarification process. Truly, Life knows our needs and we are supported and valued by Life. Surely this is reason to rejoice!

*Alicia Adams is a member of Berkley meeting, California. She lives in Mimbres, New Mexico.*



## Quantity, Not Quality

Andre Spies

When J.D. Salinger passed away a few months ago, I wondered how many thousands or tens of thousands of young people had learned from him what I did: that spiritual practice and radical disenchantment with mainstream American culture were not only compatible, but inextricably, dialectically reinforcing. When I was still in high school, I found my way to *Franny and Zooey*, to *Seymour* and *Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters*; they provided spiritual sustenance in a Bertrand Russell-style atheist household where it was hard to come by. I can't remember the details of the timing anymore—the late sixties are still a bit of a

blur—but by the time I was out of college, I had read *The Way of a Pilgrim*. Soon afterwards I obtained an edi-

tion of the *Philokalia*, the pilgrim's traveling companion, though I didn't make much of it at the time.

After college, for most of the seventies, I not only didn't want a career, I didn't even know anyone who wanted one. I had plenty of leisure time, but lacking the internal resources to take advantage of it, I was deeply dissatisfied. I tried a number of alternatives—giving up red meat was one that stuck—and eventually, out of desperation, I turned to unceasing prayer.

What appealed to me about it was the idea that quality of prayer wasn't a limiting factor, nor was the lifestyle that it was embedded in. I knew I didn't have the discipline, or even the inclination, to give up my addictions, my sloth, my various evasions. The idea of actually trying to talk to God was

profoundly embarrassing, and I didn't really believe in a personal God at all. But according to the method described in the book, all that was necessary was quantity of prayer, and it included specific instructions for how to get started.

So I determined to say the Prayer of Jesus 3,000 times a day, as the book recommended. It didn't commit me to anything, and if I couldn't manage it, or didn't like it, then so be it. The precise wording didn't seem to matter very much, as long as it included the name of God; I settled on "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner." My girlfriend, an ex-Catholic, had a rosary in her jewelry box.

It was pretty easy, in a way, right from the beginning. It was challenging enough to make me feel that I was exerting myself, but after a few days, I was able to do it without strain. I

picked apples for a few weeks every year, and that came around while I was mastering the technique.

I couldn't use a rosary out in the orchard of course, but I knew how many repetitions I could finish in fifteen minutes, so I was able to accomplish my next goal of 6,000 repetitions a day by sticking to it, and keeping track of the time. Otherwise, picking apples was a lovely accompaniment to incessant prayer, being a solitary occupation for the most part, and not calling on any part of the brain that might interfere with the prayer. I believe that the physical activity was less distracting than sitting inside at home would have been. And the natural surroundings were as relaxing, and the weather as stimulating, as always.

There were some lessons I had to learn along the way: that friends would be offended if I didn't actually participate in conversations, and that driving requires more active, undivided atten-

## Four Thoughts

Paul Buckley

### **Dilemma**

How can I fit the Spirit  
Into my life when  
My phone is turned on?

### **Meetings**

Some vitality,  
More inertia, Others  
Just waiting to die

### **Clerking**

Prayer and service  
Hold, nurture, guide, and  
direct  
Softly step aside

### **Eldering**

Listen Reflect Pray  
Support Encourage Teach  
Trust Love Believe  
Repeat

**Paul Buckley** serves Illinois Yearly Meeting as Field Secretary. He has a passion for advancement of Quakerism. He is the author of many articles and several books on Quaker history, faith, and practice.

tion than picking apples. Before long, though, the prayer kept going without any conscious effort on my part. That is, when I turned my consciousness to it, I found it was already going on. As the pilgrim suggested, it became assimilated to my breathing, and later my heartbeat. After a few more weeks, I could do 12,000 repetitions a day.

But the pilgrim also reported a number of spiritual consequences that he seemed to imply other practitioners would experience as more or less inevitable corollaries of incessant prayer:

“I felt absolute peace in my soul. During sleep, I often dreamed that I was saying the prayer. And during the day, if I happened to meet anyone, all [people] without exception were as dear to me as if they had been my nearest relations. ... All my ideas were quite calmed of their own accord. I thought of nothing whatever but my prayer. My mind tended to listen to it, and my heart began of itself to feel at times a certain warmth and pleasure. If I happened to go to church, the lengthy service of the monastery seemed short to me and no longer wearied me as it had done in time past. My lonely hut seemed like a splendid palace . . .” (French translation; 1991 edition, p.16)

None of this actually became part of my experience. I didn’t feel resentful or misled, though. Part of me never believed it would work anyway. And I was aware that one crucial requirement was missing: both the pilgrim and his various spiritual mentors emphasized the importance of guidance from an experienced practitioner, at least initially. I had never even looked for one, knowing that I was resistant to authority of all kinds, and particularly to any claims of spiritual authority. So, for the next thirty-five years, I continued saying the Jesus prayer, more or less automatically, without experiencing any of its transformative power, without any real expectation of transformation, or understanding of what that might mean.

It was a good life in many ways. I had a loving, supportive family, a rewarding career, pretty good health. At the same time, it was riven with behaviors that I’ve been ashamed of since: lots of casuistry in my ethical decisions, and I couldn’t even keep to the pretty lax standards I set for myself. Secrecy and deception were the inevi-

table consequences; ongoing depression, anger and guilt, and a gradual deterioration in my willingness to express or even acknowledge my emotions led inexorably to divorce.

Though it didn’t seem like it at the time, and it hadn’t had the transformative effect that I had hoped for, when I look back on it all now, I still feel like the prayer was answered.

Things could so easily have been so much worse. I only made it through by the skin of my teeth, by the grace of God. There were lots of people who liked and respected me. I was able to develop a devotional practice of scripture readings and meditation that proved to be sustainable. (Later I added yoga to the mix). I also started attending Quaker meetings, sometimes diligently, sometimes sporadically, with long hiatuses.

After I retired and moved to Memphis, a new phase of my prayer life

***Out of desperation, I turned to unceasing prayer.***

## Embodied Prayers

Hazel Jonjak

### Stanza 1 Quaking in Duluth Meeting

*S-l-o-w my breathing  
L-o-w-e-r my depth within*

*Exhale...*

*Inhale...*

*Gathering...*

*Gathering...*

*Now a wave!*

*Undulate and  
nod...*

*Undulate and  
nod...*

*Peristalsis of the torso  
insinuates through  
arching neck  
and ‘breaks’ with  
dip of head*

*Nudge of Friendly hand  
With gratitude I rejoin the human  
circle.*

### Stanza 2 Sweating onto Cedar Boughs In Anishnaabe Lodge

*I huddle in the West,  
Honoring Thunder-beings  
and Dreaming  
in my prayers*

*Droplets of oily sweat  
funnel down my breasts...  
As the Woman in the North  
voices gifts from  
Earth and Winter*

*My body oozes down, down to  
Aki, Mother*

*A jellyfish, clinging limp  
and damp within the  
canvas womb...  
consciousness dim...*

*The door of wool opens:  
AIR!!*

*I emerge a four-legged  
Mukwa, Bear.*

**Hazel Jonjak** lives without electricity (therefore, without computer access) in northern Wisconsin, and sent this poem by snail mail. The editors welcome Friends’ spiritual experiences by whatever communication method is available.

began. The meeting there, now my home meeting, drew me in. I joined a weekly discussion group on prayer, based on Marcelle Martin's Pendle Hill pamphlet called "Holding One Another in the Light." One evening one of the participants was describing her experience in Brother Lawrence-kind of terms, so I asked whether she had read *The Way of a Pilgrim*, and lent her one of my copies. When that discussion group came to an end, she and I and a couple of the other members continued on in a smaller weekly prayer group that turned out to be one of the formative influences in my life.

I think all four of us felt that it got us through some enormous personal challenges: the death of a beloved father, an indictment for aggravated assault, and job stresses (air traffic controller) that turned out to be permanently disabling. I began the heavy lifting that helped me turn my life around. With the support of this group, including their prayers and some hands-on healing, I began to bring up the anger, the depression, the shame, the guilt, and the fear that I had been repressing. One of these friends reminded me that God loves me the way I am, and I began dimly to understand what that might mean.

Around the same time, the friend that I had lent the book to took me to an AA Meeting. I was so impressed that I signed up on the spot. There were people there who were coming to grips with their problems as if their lives depended on it, and talking about them openly and sincerely. I knew I couldn't do it. I learned a lot in the few months I spent attending meetings (about seventy in ninety days), including humility, but before long it became clear to me and everyone else that I wasn't really an alcoholic. I did

## *The Light That Is Felt*

*John Greenleaf Whittier*

*A tender child of summers three,  
Seeking her little bed at night,  
Paused on the dark stair timidly.  
"Oh, mother! Take my hand," said she,  
"And then the dark will all be light."*

*We older children grope our way  
From dark behind to dark before;  
And only when our hands we lay,  
Dear Lord, in Thine, the night is day,  
And there is darkness nevermore.*

*Reach downward to the sunless days  
Wherein our guides are blind as we,  
And faith is small and hope delays;  
Take Thou the hands of prayer we raise,  
And let us feel the light of Thee!*

Contributed by **David Finke**, Columbia Friends Meeting, Missouri, and clerk of Illinois Yearly Meeting.

give up alcohol though, with significant benefits to my health and morals, and began a twelve-step program that brought my problems to the surface in a systematic, comprehensive way.

I entered a period of intense struggle, when God was holding me

---

*I began the heavy lifting that helped me turn my life around.*

---

on a very short rein. Every screw-up, every laxity, even honest mistakes, were followed by obvious, immediate, entirely appropriate, often devastating consequences. It was as much as I could bear. After the relationship

that had brought me to Memphis crashed, I hit the road: long lonely drives and miserable hotel rooms. I tried to eliminate the evasions that had always held me back, so no television, no leisure reading, no music even. This may have made the process shorter; it was definitely unremitting.

A lot of it was about forgiveness. Eventually I hoped to feel forgiven by God, so I could forgive myself. Of course I needed to forgive those who seemed to have trespassed against me. Praying for the happiness of my faithless, heartless ex-fiancee (actually we are good friends now) and her worthless boyfriend, and for the success of their relationship, was the hardest thing I have done in my life. I approached my travels as a sort of ninth-step pilgrimage, seeking out people I had mistreated in the past, to take responsibility for my actions, ask for forgiveness, and offer to make amends.

The first person I went to look for was a woman I hadn't seen since high school, forty-some years earlier. I had a vague report, from a mutual friend, that she had become a Quaker (from devout Catholic when I knew her) and lived on a farm in Ohio. That sounded promising, and a Google search turned up an Ohio address that was several years out of date. I went to the closest Quaker meeting there; she had moved on from the Quakers by then, but the mother of one of the staff at the Olney School knew where she was.

She was surprised to see me, of course, but her job had made her familiar with twelve-step work, so she understood what I was about. It turned out that she had left the Quakers for the Eastern Orthodox church, and though she didn't exactly say so, it was clear that she and her husband

and son were devoting their lives to unceasing prayer! She gave me a book—an anthology of writings on prayer by many of the *Philokalia* authors. Well, that didn't seem so much like coincidence as part of a pattern of synchronicities, like the ones that make up the bulk of the pilgrim's account of his own adventures. I took it as an affirmation that I was on the right track. (The frequent recurrence of these individual personal miracles now makes it impossible for me not to believe in a personal God—whose eye really is on the sparrow—difficult as it is for me to reconcile this idea with the rest of my theology.)

A few weeks later, when I got to New Jersey, I visited an old college friend who was the first Quaker I ever met. Her wedding had been the first Meeting for Worship I ever attended. I don't remember how Pendle Hill came up—maybe I just asked her what she knew about it, because I had only heard about it casually, a few times, and knew next to nothing about it myself. Since I was in the neighborhood, I thought I'd stop in and see if they could put me up for the night. It turned out to be the first good night's sleep I had in weeks, so I said hmmm ... and stayed another night. I also met

Marcelle Martin, though I didn't connect her with the pamphlet we had used in our prayer group until much later. I came back for a

course a week or so later, and that was interesting too. People were spilling their souls all over the place, and washing it all away with tears. I was right there with them. I started thinking about the resident program, since it looked like I might fit right in. And Marcelle was the first person—maybe ever—that I wanted to consult about my spiritual questions. I told her a little bit of this story.

*What Canst Thou Say?*

Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (*Isaiah 40:31*)

Before I made it back to Pendle Hill though, I had several classic *Dark Night of the Soul* experiences. John of the Cross helped me recognize what was going on, but pissed me off by telling me there was nothing I could do about it. Sandra Cronk's excellent book, which I lifted from the Quaker Meeting library in Raleigh, North Carolina, at least showed me why it had to be that way. After the worst of these, I

came out in a bright and joyful place that seemed like what people meant when they spoke of redemption. This was one of the best days of my life so far, after one of the worst nights. I felt like I was authentically myself for the first time in my life, and that it was OK.

God did in fact love me the way I am.

Thinking that I had once and for all arrived, it was a shock to realize that I still had more dark nights, and a lot more work still to do. But this redemption experience was the first ray of light that brought warmth and consolation, rather than just illuminating yet another pile of shit that I had to deal with. It was significant to me that it had been a passage from George Fox that got me out of the dark night and into redemption, rather than any of the good stuff I was reading from other spiritual traditions. It was this, along with

the intensity of commitment I found at Pendle Hill, and the community I found at Memphis Friends Meeting, that convinced me a few months later to join my monthly meeting.

When I got to Pendle Hill, my relationship to God changed again, though it took me some time to realize it. Instead of getting beat up regularly, I started to feel that a lot more of what I wanted to do was accept-

able to God—a lot less rod and more staff. But it wasn't only the staff—I also learned from my fellow students, from short programs and weekend workshops, from guest speakers and random sojourners. My spiritual life increased in intensity. I was learning so much, that I had difficulty absorbing it all—for me, the downside of Pendle Hill was always the lack of assimilation time. Marcelle's class on prayer exposed me to a number of important new ideas and experiences; she asked me to tell some of this story there. But the class was only part of a package that included daily Meeting for Worship, weekly Meeting for Healing, an intensive week-long meditation retreat, Experiment with Light, spiritual nurture, dreamwork, art, music, labor, silence. It opened me up.

After I left, what I needed was solitary contemplative time, and I've found that on the road and at the Burt House in Ithaca, New York. "My heart began of itself to feel at times a certain warmth and pleasure," as

*John of the Cross  
pissed me off by telling  
me there was nothing I  
could do about it.*

*The practice of incessant  
prayer works the way  
it is supposed to—in  
God's sweet time.*

Christian prayer is always a response to a presence already felt. The awareness of a desire to pray again is already prayer. As the desert fathers so often said, "If you want to pray, you are already praying."

—Edward J. Farrell from *Gathering the Fragments*

the pilgrim says. When these periods of spontaneous joy first appeared, I was incredulous; nothing in my life's experience had prepared me for them. I can't say "if I happened to meet anyone, all [people] without exception were as dear to me as if they had been my nearest relations," but I hope to get there eventually. There's still some outstanding ninth-step work that I need to take care of. But I can't remember the last time I felt anger or fear (as distinct from irritation or anxiety.) And I fall on my face often enough to know that this self-congratulatory mode is ephemeral, and that flat on my face is where the important work gets done. [After writing this a couple of months ago, I absolutely exploded at one of my young housemates last week for a completely trivial offense, slamming a door and calling her "a real pain in the ass." Really I was angry about something else entirely. A very humbling experience.]

Most of my prayer these days is intercessory prayer, and I like the pilgrim's formula for that also: "Most merciful God, thy will be done, which will have all men and women to be saved and to come unto knowledge of the truth; help and save thy servant [e.g.] Marcelle. Take this desire of mine as a cry of love which thou hast commanded." I have sixteen people on my list right now, including the members of my original prayer group.

It's what I do, and it keeps me from feeling guilty that my life is so blissful. I feel like I'm doing God's will. My favorite reading from the last

few months is Alan Watts' *Behold the Spirit*. Life beckons.

My conclusion from all this is that the practice of incessant prayer does work the way it is supposed to—in God's sweet time. In my case this was the traditional forty years.

*Andre Spies is a member of Memphis Friends Meeting. His hard-won contemplative equilibrium has been completely consumed by an unexpected gender transition. She was reborn sometime in August, say the 23rd, at the age of sixty-two. If she overcomes her ambivalence about hormones, she'll be surging into adolescence sometime towards the end of February, as we are reading this.*



## WCTS Needs a New Treasurer

*The WCTS team is grateful for the loyal and reliable service of Joan Johnston for the past few years, but since she has to move on to other involvements in her life, we need a new Treasurer.*

*The responsibilities of the Treasurer are to make deposits, write checks to cover the expenses of producing and mailing What Canst Thou Say, and make periodic reports to the other volunteer WCTS staff. It is not a very big job because there is only a little activity, but this labor of love undergirds all that WCTS does.*

*If you are led to volunteer for these tasks and interested in joining the WCTS team, please send a letter expressing your interest and qualifications for the volunteer position as Treasurer of WCTS, along with a recommendation from your Monthly Meeting, by snail mail to WCTS c/o Richard Himmer, 1035 Hereford Drive, Blue Bell PA 19422-1925, or by email <info@whatcanstthousay.org>.*

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# Please write for *What Canst Thou Say?*

(See instructions for authors on page 4)



May 2011

## **Animals**

Guest Editor: **Amy Perry with Mariellen Gilpin**

*And God saw that it was good.* (Genesis 1:20-26). How has an animal or part of one, real or envisioned, encouraged your spiritual journey? Has an animal become sacred to you? Are there any animals you have a spiritual connection to? What is that like? Has an animal somehow saved you? Have you experienced an animal's soul, or have you communed with one? Tell us how experience with an animal brought you closer to God.

Deadline: February 15, 2011

August 2011

## **Creativity and Mysticism**

Editor: **Judy Lumb**

Whether expressed as poetry, prose, drawing, painting, sculpture, dance, or music, our creativity often seems to have divine mystical sources. Have you felt like a channel with creative inspiration flowing through you? What is your experience of creative inspiration? How have others responded to your creativity? Have you experienced creative inspiration in a group? How do you celebrate and give thanks for your creativity?

Deadline: May 15, 2011

November 2011

## **Death and Dying**

Editor: **Mike Resman**

*Death be not proud* (John Donne). Facing our own death or that of a loved one is challenging. What spiritual lessons have helped you? What have you experienced while supporting loved ones who were dying? Have you participated in a planned death? What are your reflections on that experience? How do you view your own death? What experiences have led you to that view? How have your loved ones responded to your plans and attitudes toward dying?

Deadline: August 15, 2011

## **What Canst Thou Say?**

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**Prayer**  
**(Supplement)**