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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*

Addiction and Grace (Supplement)

Healed God's Way

Mariellen Gilpin

*This treasure we have is held in clay pots, so that it
will be evident that it comes from God. — Paul*

I have had the mission of praying for others, but due to mental illness, I deliberately did not focus on anyone by praying individual prayers for them. Focusing on an individual was utterly addictive—I was a binge pray-er, who prayed for one person after another, physically delighting in the energies released by my praying, and getting further and further out of touch with reality. Later, God made it possible for me to follow my mission of praying for others by giving me a rote prayer, which I said once for everyone, and then I recited quickly the names of everyone on my prayer list—without focusing on anyone. This story is how God granted me the gift of praying for others in ways specific to their needs.

Two years ago my husband and I were sick, and he took much longer than I to recover. I became worried as he continued to be under the weather, and I finally somewhat apologetically asked God to heal him physically. I said my rote prayer for him by himself, then apologized again. I heard a message: *Your prayer is heard.* My husband got better. The whole thing impressed me, but I didn't focus on anyone else for several months.

Then I had a thought process that went something like this: "I prayed

for my husband in utter humility, and I didn't hallucinate afterward. Maybe I should again try focusing on a few dear Quaker friends with a specific prayer, and just see if a form of prayer that would mean a great deal to me is now available." So, I prayed for my good Friend Terri, who is housebound with multiple illnesses. The next day she

felt enough better that she volunteered to drive us both to a restaurant—after many months in which she'd been out of the house only when taken to a doctor. A day or so later, she continued feeling significantly better. In the meantime, however, I experienced a lot of hallucinating. I returned to my rote recital and my laundry list of names. I

From the Editors:

While choosing an order for these stories, I was very conscious of mixing up the themes. I was carefully putting writing about "classic" substance abuses between stories on less traditional addictions, then finding I had too many pieces about less tangible cravings all in one spot, and trying to shuffle them all again. When I asked my husband, Michael, to distill each tale into a shorthand theme like "addiction to reading" while we were struggling to get the balance of stories right, he gave it his best shot and then, a bit exasperated, said to me, "They are all about the same thing, though. They are all about control, about wanting to control what cannot be controlled." His shrewd observation reminded me immediately of another good friend telling me of an insight someone once shared with her, that all addiction is idolatry. Idolatry implies worship of false gods or ideas, but what is being mistakenly adored by the addict? Maybe the false deity of the addict is control over our lives when we are meant to yield to Spirit. Admitting we are powerless over our addictions is the first of the famous twelve steps many use for recovery. Perhaps one could also phrase it like this, "We admit we are not our own creations with absolute control over our lives, but are instead children of God." Reading these intimate stories, I often felt I heard this very message being shared, with a joyful addition at the end: "Thank goodness!"

Jacqueline Hannah with Mariellen Gilpin and Mike Resman

felt like two cents. I couldn't continue to help my dear Friend.

A few weeks later, I again prayed a specific prayer for someone. I hallucinated for a few days afterwards. Again, I concluded I was not yet strong enough to pray safely for people when I focused specifically on them. Yet, a few days later the friend I'd prayed for wanted to tell me of a life-changing experience he'd had.

What happened next was a remarkable series of conversations with three Friends, each of whom helped me on the path to healing. The first Friend said: "You have the gift of praying in faith for others' needs." Suddenly, I felt responsible for a gift that had been made available, but I was not strong enough to exercise the gift without hallucinating. Over a number of years, more and more outlets for my prayer life had been made available to me, so I thought the new gift would not have been made available if I weren't supposed to work very hard to be able to practice it. I felt like a poster child for a contradiction: I had a gift, but I had a disability so that I could not practice it.

Three days later, I decided to say my rote prayer for Terri, as I had for

my husband, and see if it was safe to focus to that extent—not a prayer tailored specifically for Terri, but a one-size-fits-all prayer that has been safe for many years when prayed for my entire list. It felt like a worthy thing

The Flow turned into waves, gentle ones, up and through my body and out my crown. It has continued, very gently, very peacefully; no anxiety or tendency to fascination.

to try. Terri was unusually functional that evening, although not wonderful by any means. And I felt an immense sense of peace when I prayed for her.

The next day, I prayed the rote prayer for her and experienced what Elaine Emily called "the lusciousness of prayer for others." The physical effect was instantly addictive. I was roundly tempted to follow my prayer for Terri with prayers for others, but decided that Terri would continue to be my test case—since the addictiveness had not been so apparent in my

prayers for Terri earlier, it would be well to hold off until it became clear whether the delight of praying for even one person would trigger the illness. It would be an effort to hold off, because I felt a real desire to pray again. You've heard of binge drinkers—I was a binge pray-er. This was not yet praying tailor-made prayers for individuals, but it might be a stepping stone, a mile marker on the way to being free to pray safely for individual needs.

In the second conversation, a longtime Friend put her finger on the real reason why the voices troubled me when I prayed for individuals: I attached too much importance to the fact I was doing the praying—I'd tripped over the sin of pride. Too much ego, now that the gift of praying for others had been named. The first Friend gave me a sense of responsibility. The second Friend's remark seemed to conflict with this. The third Friend suggested I needed to make sure the flow of God's intent for the person was the stream into which I flowed with my prayers.

As I lay in bed that night, *The Flow* wanted to be free to move through me, and I wanted clarity about what to do about the utter addictiveness. It came to me just to give the addiction to Jesus. I asked for help in dealing as Jesus would have me deal with the attractiveness...and it was suggested that I invite Jesus to pray through me. I thought it over—was that invitation likely to give me more trouble with my mind? But it seemed like the perfect response, making it clear to myself that the prayer-flow was God's gift, not mine.

I made the invitation, and *The Flow* turned into waves, gentle ones, up and through my body and out my crown. It has continued, very gently, very peacefully; no anxiety or tendency to fascination. *The Flow* takes care of itself, and me too on its way through me. I said to Jesus, "You're welcome to pray for whoever or whatever, but

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if some of your prayers could be for these Friends, I will be grateful. I am sure these Friends are in your loving concern.”

The Flow continues without my needing to observe or monitor. It’s simply there, while I go about other things. I’ve heard voices, but I have no difficulty knowing they’re aspects of self. My third Friend’s metaphor seems to be literally true: there’s a stream of prayer, and our prayers are part of the flow of that eternal stream. I think this *Flow* is part of the answer to the Biblical injunction to pray always: It really is possible. Literally.

The Flow goes on all the time, sometimes faintly, sometimes strongly. It is so peaceful that I have no hesitation about praying for others. I feel free, for the most part, simply to mention their names and leave the rest to Jesus. I don’t need to focus. It is very intimate, very lovely. It’s now been several months of steady prayer the new way. I’m very much in the real world, along with having a sense of sweetness and *Presence*.

Is *The Flow* addictive? Oh, yes. For many years I have thought of my illness as a behavioral addiction, and my prayer has been that my addiction to loving, serving and pleasing God might take precedence over all my other addictions to lesser things. I have also for a long time asked that God’s love and compassion might flow to the whole world with such abundance, such utter abandon, that it would simply flow on through us to the world around us. Both prayers seem literally to have come true. I am awed, I am at peace, I love God, I am grateful and filled with joy. I have been healed God’s way.

Mariellen Gilpin is a member of Urbana-Champaign Meeting, Illinois, and on the editorial team of What Canst Thou Say. Amy Perry helped her revise this piece.

Freeing Myself of Nicotine

Dalton Roberts

A doctor who treats addictions once told me that nicotine is the most addictive substance known to man—even more addictive than heroin. He needs no more proof than my life. I was born addicted. My mother lived in a time and place where many women kept a pinch of snuff under their lips. They had no idea they were setting up their children for lifetime addictions.

I am sure that’s why I kept gravitating to the room where my Uncle Paul sat and smoked his unfiltered Camels. I still remember how good that smoke smelled to me. I declare to you that I could smell it at the opposite end of the house and would come running.

My maternal grandfather lived with us. He sat most of the day listening to all the news broadcasts on our big Philco radio. He was either smoking a cigar or chewing on the butt at all hours of the day. That pungent smoke did not smell as sweet as Uncle Paul’s Camels, but I liked it enough to steal one of his cigar butts. It got me as sick as I have ever been. Still I plunged forward in my quest for nicotine.

Finally, when I was just 13, I started saving my lunch money and buying packs of cigarettes I hid in our basement. Those stolen moments with my cigarettes became the high point of my day. Mother became aware of it and when I was 16 my father said, “If you’re gonna smoke, don’t go off and hide like a criminal. Smoke in the house.” He would buy me a carton of cigarettes, but what he didn’t know was that his carton was not all I was smoking. I was still saving my lunch money to buy more.

In my twenties I was smoking a couple of packs a day. In my thirties and forties it was three or four packs a day. Mark Twain said, “I know I can quit smoking. I have done it hundreds of times.” Over the years I must have quit smoking at least ten times. I always went back.

The thing that gave me enough motivation to quit was my music. First, I was coughing between songs. Then between verses. One night I noticed I was actually coughing or clearing my throat within lines. A listener noticed it, and I finally had the source of determi-

nation to quit. I did, and within three months was singing again without coughing.

Sadly, this is not the “lived happy

ever after” part of my story. Recently Dr. William Campbell Douglass II released a book entitled *The Health Benefits of Tobacco*. I bought it and inhaled every word of it. He said six cigarettes a day or one cigar of pure tobacco does you no damage and actually has health benefits.

On a daylong trip out of state I stopped and got two packs of Native American pure tobacco cigarettes. By the time I returned home, I had smoked my six cigarettes for the day. That night as I slept I dreamed of waking and having my next six smokes.

While robotically smoking my allotted six cigarettes a day, my ratio-

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free ... do not let yourself be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1).

Freedom is the pause between stimulus and response. —Rollo May

nal mind also asked for equal time. It reminded me that I had definitely lost a portion of my lung power in the years I smoked and asked me if six cigarettes a day might take away a little more. I also thought of all the times nicotine cravings had disrupted my enjoyment of people and events.

I remembered that old smoking wheeze that would interfere with my sleep and be embarrassing at times in the arms of a lover. Who wants someone wheezing in their ear? I recalled how my house, car and clothes stunk. Even if six cigarettes a day are safe, that's all it would take to stink me and my world up real good. Worst of all, I recalled vividly, was the feeling of powerlessness—of being unable to quit. Before I finished my initial purchase of two packs I became aware of a tiny flicker of that old craving and became aware that one can get addicted to just that much nicotine.

One day in preparing a speech on freedom, I recalled one of my favorite Bible verses: *It is for freedom that Christ has set us free ... do not let yourself be burdened again by a yoke of slavery* (Gal. 5:1). Think of the powerful juice in that verse. It is for freedom itself that Christ sets us free. Freedom has inherent value! He sets us free so we can simply enjoy the experience of being free. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Thank God Almighty, I am free at last." I am embarrassed that I risked losing that freedom, but in the grace bestowed in the stirring of my memory, I grabbed the life jacket and made it back to the old Ship of Zion.

I do believe the Lord can keep me healthy and happy without my six cigarettes a day.

Dalton Roberts is a singer, songwriter, and columnist in Chattanooga, Tennessee. For sixteen years he was County Executive. He enjoys Quaker worship and Unity services.

Unmerited Benevolence

Contessa Miller

For a long time, I felt that my sister had a serious problem with addiction. I wondered why she chose not to kick her drug, and most recently, alcohol addiction. I cried, prayed to God and pleaded with her to get treatment or help to rid herself of her debilitating and destructive habits. Nothing I said or did made any difference to her.

About 13 years ago, I met a neighbor who became one of my dearest friends. I realized from the beginning that he was an alcoholic. He had used many forms of heavy drugs in the past, but was only drinking alcohol at this point in his life. He drank from a squeeze bottle from the time he awoke until he went to sleep. He reminded me of a baby that is quite contentious unless there is a pacifier in his mouth. Whenever my friend felt I was looking at him in a judgmental manner, he was quick to tell me that I was a pill popper. At least he didn't have to deal with life by living under the influence of prescribed drugs. He caused me to do some serious thinking about how I typically responded to life's pressures and stress.

Since 1983, I have suffered from panic attacks. I worked full-time after finishing high school, instead of going

on to college. However, after many years, I realized that promotions and a decent wage were not coming my way, because I did not have a college degree. I decided to go to university. I didn't bother to check out a very crucial point in the student directory: the unequivocal requirement to finish 20 quarter hours of natural science courses with labs. Each quarter term when I attempted to enroll in such a course, the class was filled; and, since I didn't bother to consult with a student advisor to get the natural science requirements satisfied, I put it off until my last two quarters before graduation. This caused such an extreme amount of pressure that I had a panic attack. I thought I was having a heart attack. My body underwent physical and psychological changes it never had before.

Physically I was okay in every way. The psychiatrist that I saw a couple of times a month prescribed two medications. The medication helped me greatly, except when I was in a natural science class or lab, or even when I attempted to go to such a class. I was rushed to the Emergency Room on a number of occasions. I was not able to complete the 20 hours of natural science. However, I was able to

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graduate because I was only six hours shy of the total quarter hours needed. I participated in the commencement exercises in May of 1984. It was always my hope to return and complete the last six hours, but fate would not have it so. Each time I attempted to return to the university, my anxiety/panic attacks increased, and I was left in a debilitated and dejected state. No amount of medicine or therapy could get me to return to the university to do those last six quarter hours.

I have had long periods of time when I had better control of the panic attacks—not even taking medication. But, for reasons not understood by me, situations brought the attacks back, often in a fierce way. I returned to prescribed psychoactive drugs—pill popping, as my neighbor/buddy described. Sometimes an attack occurred even when I took my medication. At those times I felt completely helpless, out of control, and worthless. I even wondered if I was cursed for something I had done in the past or in a past life. Often I have attempted to rid myself of the dependence on pills to keep me functional and my spirits lifted. When I failed in these attempts, I experienced tremendous depression, which led to a dependence on anti-depressants. Such a wild and wacky cycle!

I sought God, God's grace, and solace everyday. I prayed for help, guidance and freedom from the panic attacks. Often in solitude I realized certain things about my life and wondered about them in relation to the panic attacks. I could see how these attacks had completely defined and limited everything in my life experience. I saw that my mother's death in 1972 created a huge void and immeasurable sadness in my life. Then when my stepfather died in 1982, the final pillar of parental support, love, and acceptance disappeared. This loss was a major source of the attacks that continue to manifest to the present day.

My various interpersonal affairs and interactions have been quite rewarding and diverse. I have allowed myself to establish friendships in a number of religious paths and groups through the years. However, at this point in my life, I have returned to the Religious Society of Friends. As I look back on my spiritual travails, I can see that my general disposition and mindset has always been one that reflected the non-judgmental views of Friends/Quakers and my personal stance regarding peace, equality, and community have been strengthened as I walk this path. Throughout my life, I have appreciated how grace, the unmerited benevolence extended to me, has sustained me in all situations.

I can admit that I slipped into a state of addiction to prescription pills with the onset of panic attacks; and it is without doubt that this addiction has opened my eyes to see more of God's presence in my life. It has been the panic attacks that have supported me financially all these years, because I have received Social Security disability. This has allowed me to continue living the lifestyle I had when I worked full-time. I have seen who are my real friends and support systems through the years, because real friends accept me, panic attacks and all. I have seen how grace, love in action, has tempered my view of others who have addictions. I have come to understand that others' addictions are no more or no less "real" than mine. And, because I have received the redeeming Grace of God, they also receive it. For me, this realization is a most wondrous gift from God.

Contessa Miller is a member of 57th Street Meeting, Chicago. She was ordained as a spiritual peace minister in 2004 by James Twyman, an international peace advocate and troubadour, after attending his Beloved Community of Spiritual Peacemaking Seminary.

From Addiction to Compassion

Rhonda Ashurst

I used to be obsessed about food. Most of my day revolved around what I was going to eat, or not eat. Now eating is a natural part of my day—I eat when I'm hungry and until I'm satisfied. I love to cook and share meals with others. I can't recall the last time I binged and purged, or even thought about it.

What happened to my eating disorder? When I look back, it was a slow and gradual process, taking nearly as long as the years I was an active bulimic. Angels were sent to help me, and by God's grace I found my way through the disorienting ups and downs of recovering from an addiction. What I didn't realize is that my addiction would become a pathway to developing compassion for myself and others.

While in the throes of bulimia, every waking moment was filled with thoughts of food. I kept a running tally in my mind of how many calories I'd consumed, carefully calculating when I could eat again and how many calories I could have. Inevitably, the time came when I would lose control and eat more than I had allowed myself. Suddenly, the addiction was triggered. I would be convinced people could see the bulge of my belly and would think less of me. I would get fat! I had blown it again, so why not go for the Big Binge? Thoughts quickly turned to cravings. I would buy a large pizza and a carton of chocolate ice cream—a bag of Cheetos and a box of Oreo cookies—a burger, fries, vanilla shake—an assortment of candy bars: Snickers, Milky Way, Baby Ruth.

I spread out the purchases between different stores and restaurants, so no one figured out what I was doing. Then I'd find a quiet place to consume them—my car, the lower stacks in the

library, the house if my roommate was not home. Next was finding an even quieter place to vomit. I knew where all the private, public restrooms in the city were located.

After vomiting, when the rush of adrenaline passed, the shaking would start, and I would think of food again. I'd eat anything to stabilize my blood sugar and stop the shaking, often triggering another round of binge-purge. Sometimes I would go through three or four cycles in a day, finally collapsing at night to sleep it off, hoping for a binge-free day tomorrow. Always there was the shame I felt about not being able to control my bingeing. I hated what I was doing and yet I was unable to stop. The harsher I was with myself the worse it became. I was desperate for a way out. The challenge of a food addiction is that you can't go cold turkey—you can't stop eating forever.

At times I went into long, downward spiraling slides that left the corners of my mouth torn and the tops of my knuckles bleeding. Hundreds of dollars literally down the toilet. I hated myself and my inability to control this demon. Then somehow, I would begin again to try and eat like a normal person.

I became a bulimic when I was fourteen, as a way to eat and not gain weight. When I finally admitted it to my family, the counseling sessions began. In those first years, counselors were useless. They looked at me with thinly veiled horror and made vague suggestions about avoiding trigger foods and improving family communication. I had no idea how to do these things. Trigger foods surrounded me every day of my life. And how was a 14-year-old supposed to improve family communication? When my father walked out on our first family session, refusing to ever return, it only reinforced my sense that it was hopeless. I felt misunderstood, ashamed, and impotent.

Addiction to Time and Space

Mary R. Hopkins

Raised to believe that time is money and must be well spent before support could be earned, I lost the assurance that I live in the right place at the right time. When I learned to say, "Not my will but Thy Will," what I needed manifested itself. The Divine, not me, meets the needs of the collective, and the collective is bigger than my ego. I learned to laugh as I flowed or got stuck in traffic and at parking places. Not my will but Thy will. I have never gone without shelter, food or clothing as I learned to follow my bliss in harmony with the whole.

Mary R. Hopkins is a member of Kendal (Pennsylvania) 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?*

Then I went to college, moving from a small town to a city, and living with an older roommate in one of my parents' rentals. I had always been a good student, and I pushed myself to earn A's in all my classes. It was the one thing I did well. The eating disorder was my new best friend, keeping me company in the lonely hours of studying. Unlike human friends, it allowed me to work almost continuously, without complaint. I could eat and study at the same time.

For all the surrogate comfort it gave me, I knew it was killing me and I had to get help. I tried a variety of individual therapists, but I continued to binge and purge. Then, one day I saw a notice about an eating disorder support group on campus. I went to the next meeting. For once, I was with others who did these same horrible things, who couldn't stop themselves either. At last, I felt understood and I knew I was not alone. I began to heal.

I noticed I was most tempted when I was especially upset or stressed. I read Geneen Roth's book *When Food is Love*. I realized that I used food to comfort myself. This was a major

breakthrough. I needed to find other ways to soothe myself.

I'd been going about recovery all wrong. I thought I had to discipline myself into quitting, or make rigid goals like "I'll never do it again, after this time." I thought the problem was a lack of self-control. It turns out it was too much control, too much harsh discipline and perfectionism. I pushed myself continuously—studying, going to classes, working, volunteering in campus organizations. There was no time for relaxation or fun. My boyfriend encouraged me to play more. I resisted mightily, fearful that giving in would lead me to become lazy and irresponsible. Then I really would be worthless. Maybe I was a bulimic, but at least I was a successful student.

Slowly, I began to understand that it was this merciless driving that was leading to my illness. I had to learn to play more, be gentler, and hold myself when I needed to cry or call someone else for a shoulder. I had to give myself permission to be sad, angry, have a bad day, be lazy, make mistakes, be human. I realized that I rarely spoke my truth when I thought it would disappoint

someone else. I tried to figure out the least controversial things to be and do. I was a pleaser. I had no idea who I was, except a nice girl and a good student with an eating disorder.

In my mid-twenties, I started seeing a therapist who helped me begin to feel, to give voice to the many things I suppressed, to discover myself. She also encouraged me to meditate, and I began a regular practice of meditation and prayer. I reconnected with my spiritual life, which I had abandoned. I'd felt that even God could not love someone who was so weak and out of control. During meditation I experienced a loving Presence embracing me, helping me to accept and forgive myself.

I was an active bulimic for over six years, and it took another six years before I completely stopped bingeing and purging. Even after the last binge, I continued the journey of self-discovery and the mending of my battered self-image. Looking back, my healing came down to a willingness to feel my feelings, to tell my truth, to loosen the tight collar of control, to be there for myself, even when someone else thought it was selfish. And I still work on those lessons every day. I thank God for the angels who helped me find my way and for the gift of knowing I am always loved.

My bulimia was a hard, ruthless teacher, but a good one. It left me, not because I demanded it, but because I was willing to tell my truth and treat myself with loving-kindness. As my addiction died, compassion for myself and others was born, and I understood that it is love which heals us.

Rhonda Ashurst is a life coach in Alamosa, Colorado. She is a spiritual universalist and feels closest to God when in nature.



Conversation with the Author

Rhonda Ashurst and Mariellen Gilpin had this conversation shortly after Rhonda wrote her story for this issue.

Mariellen: I am concerned about you saying you are completely free of your eating disorder. I think we need to help fellow addicts to avoid falling into denial that we are addicted.

Rhonda: I have spent the weekend reflecting on my experience with my eating disorder, and my experiences with others who have addictions. There is a statistic in the eating disorder literature: 30% continue with active symptoms of the disorder for life, 30% have issues with eating but no longer have active symptoms, and 30% recover fully. Recovering fully is defined by normal eating patterns without the desire to binge and purge.

I watched myself this week as I moved through a difficult issue, one that caused me emotional distress. In the days of my addiction, I would have immediately thought of food as a way to cope with my distress. The first thing would have been the tray of chocolates I have perpetually sitting on the kitchen counter. Then I would have ordered a pizza and bought ice cream and eaten it all, throwing up in between. I might have topped it off with a run to Burger King.

Instead, I sat down with my dog and cried while he licked my tears, and I let him. I stroked his fur and just let my feelings flow. Then I got up and had

The Hidden Transformation

The night is dark for our protection.

John of the Cross wrote that the dark night is not only obscure but also a gift; it is not sinister or evil. Sinister evil has a different word for it in Spanish, tinieblas, meaning enslavement to attachment. The obscura darkness implies that interior transformation and liberation take place, but not so visibly. "The night involves relinquishing attachments."

"If we really knew what we were called to relinquish on this journey our defenses would never allow us to take the first step. Sometimes the only way we can enter the deeper dimensions of the journey is by being unable to see where we are going."

In spiritual matters we're more apt to stumble when we think we know where we're going. "Thus, John of the Cross says God darkens our awareness in order to keep us safe. When we cannot chart our own course we become vulnerable to God's protection, and the darkness becomes a 'guiding night', a 'night more kindly than the dawn.'"

"To guide us toward the love that we most desire, we must be taken where we could not and would not go on our own. And lest we sabotage the journey, we must not know where we are going. Deep in the darkness, way beneath our senses, God is instilling another, better love and deeper, more urgent longings that empower our willingness for all the necessary relinquishments along the way."

Whereas tinieblas is enslavement to attachment and sin, an impoverishment of love; when we go through obscura we are freed for the fullness of love of God and others. "Freed from the idolatries of their attachments, individuals are able to be completely in love with God and to love their neighbors as themselves."

—Gerald May, Dark Night of the Soul

my traditional evening glass of wine and journaled. After that, I decided I wasn't very hungry, but I needed some nutrition. I asked myself what I wanted and I decided on a smoothie. Something sweet and comforting. I threw blueberries, a banana, strawberry sorbet, a scoop of chocolate whey protein, vanilla soy milk and ice in a blender. I sat down and watched the dying embers of the sunset over Mount Blanca and sipped my smoothie. I gave thanks for all the good things in my life and the good things about the situation that was causing me distress. I prayed to God for help to find my way. Then I called a friend and she commiserated with me as I told my story. I decided the next thing I really wanted was to watch a funny movie, so I did. It wasn't until I reflected on my evening the next day that I realized I hadn't even had my usual evening chocolate. I guess the shake had satisfied my sweet tooth.

I understand your concern about feeding into the denial aspect of addiction and convincing oneself one is recovered when that is not true. On the other hand, I believe it is possible to completely recover from an addiction. That would be indicated by no longer having a desire for the addiction, which requires one to actively choose not to express it. I have experienced this and known others who have also had this experience. This is true for people who have had eating disorders, alcoholism, drug and nicotine addiction, and sexual addiction. It is also true that a larger percentage of people continue to deal with the addiction in some form throughout life.

I would challenge you to include a story of complete recovery in the issue on Addiction and Grace, whether it is mine or someone else's. It is part of the story, too, and just as true as the experience of living with addiction. I believe it is important to keep the hope alive that one can fully recover, that

Friends,

The tempter comes in the form of anything you are addicted to. And when he can trouble you, he has the advantage, and you are lost.

After you see yourselves, stand still in That Which is Pure and mercy will come. After you see your thoughts and temptations, don't think, just submit, and power will come. Stand still in That Which Shows and Discovers and strength will immediately come. Stand still in the Light, and submit to it and the tempter will be hushed and gone and content will come.

When temptations and troubles appear, sink down in That Which is Pure, and your troubles will be hushed and fly away. After you have seen yourselves, your strength is in standing still. Whatever addictions you see in yourselves—temptations, corruption, uncleanness—you think you will never overcome them. Your earthly reason tells you that you will lose everything. Don't listen to it! Stand still in the Light that shows you your addictions, and you will receive strength from the Lord, and help beyond all your expectations.

Then you will grow up in peace, and no trouble will move you. David fretted when he looked out, but when he was still no trouble could move him. When your thoughts are out and abroad, that's when troubles move you. But keep your minds on that Spirit that existed before the letter and you'll learn to read the scriptures the right way. If you do anything by your own will, you tempt God, so stand still in that Power that Brings Peace. —George Fox

—Paraphrase of George Fox on addiction (Epistle 10), posted by Mark Wutka. <earofthesoul.blogspot.com/2009/05/epistle-10-in-modern-english.html> (Contributed by Maurine Pyle)

it is possible, because it is. I wanted nothing more as a young woman than to know the story of someone who made it to the other side of bulimia. Those stories were hard to come by at a time when we were only beginning to talk about it at all. I tell my story for this reason.

Is there a way to deal with your concerns by adding some editorial commentary expressing those concerns? As a Licensed Professional Counselor, I am certainly willing to add my own commentary that this is not everyone's experience. However, it has been my experience and it feels very important to me to remain true to my own journey in this essay.

I must say that I have enjoyed our dialogue about this, Mariellen. It has been a rich source of reflection and

observation for me, and I thank you for taking me on the journey!

Mariellen: I guess my own experience with addiction is worth mentioning. As you know, I think that demons are a reality, and for probably eleven years after making my decision to go on the wagon (for my behavioral addiction) they continued to pester me from time to time. By "pester" I mean causing me to hallucinate about whatever they were working on me about. I noticed eventually that they only pestered me if I fell into thinking that I'd licked that problem!!

They actively worked with me for eleven years, making sure I no longer responded with the addictive thinking when they presented an old trigger. When I no longer responded, they

moved on to another trigger, another behavior. It was only when they were completely satisfied that I'd come to terms with all my old triggers that they ceased to pester me.

Part of our mutual understanding at this point is that I should continue to think of myself as addicted, and always be vigilant, but with that understood, they don't need to pester me, at all. At least they haven't pestered me since 2006. They've moved on to another set of issues, and indeed we seem to have largely resolved that issue, as well. Now that I've written this paragraph, I'm inclined to offer it to Jacqueline, too. Thank you for pursuing the matter!

Rhonda: Thank you for sharing from your own experience. It seems that you have also found your place of peace, and that it includes continued humility and vigilance. I was thinking this morning that what is most important is finding the real truth of where we are with our addictions/attachments and whether we have recovered, or whether they remain as companions and teachers.

Though I have recovered from my bulimia, I am still addicted/attached to some of the unhealthy thought patterns which were underlying causes. One example that comes to mind is my tendency to worry. This is an addiction I will work with as companion and teacher for the rest of my life! It is my reminder to come back to the now and trust in Spirit. Again my appreciation for your questions, which have led to this!

Your query has opened up some very interesting dialogues with fellow writers, friends and clients. I received this comment from a member of my Writers Circle about her own process with addiction. She gave me permission to share it.

"I smoked for 10 years and quit. I quit three more times then I was suc-

cessful. But when I was under stress (I was an ER charge nurse) I always craved a cigarette and sometimes went back to that, to the surprise of doctors I worked with. One day, one of them said it was not such a good way to handle stress, because I was justifying that it is okay to smoke for stress control. This made me stop and realize I was only fooling myself—I wasn't smoke free at all. I continued to sneak cigarettes occasionally, and found a few friends who smoked, so I could get nicotine when I craved it without buying it. If I bought cigarettes, then I was really addicted. I finally said enough a few years ago. I substituted walking, bike riding and meditation for cigarettes to relieve stress, and gave myself a much needed gift. Not only did I receive the blessings of an alternative I was seeking, I also was gifted with the memory of how much I always loved to ride my bike. I haven't had any cravings in two years and finally consider myself smoke free.

"I realized that for years the addiction was still simmering under the surface, unresolved, and only I could change that. The change could go either way: it was my choice. The power of this realization was what gave me the strength to choose to be without nicotine for relief of stress.

"Along these same lines, I used to believe, even after therapy and learning this isn't true, that it was selfish and egotistical to love myself. I felt it was perfectly acceptable to buy things for myself (especially when I had no children) but I felt guilty and shameful if I began to make positive changes to myself. My success in quitting cigarettes came after I decided it was not wrong to take care of myself. Interestingly, this came after I realized that too many friends were draining me dry emotionally, and I had allowed that to occur. My approach was gentle but thoughtful as I weeded out people who I had allowed to drain me. Only after I took responsibility for my part in creating that situation could I let it go—with harmony and acceptance. It was almost ceremonial for me, and brought me to a new level of celebration about myself—who I choose to let into my life—and about the precious gift of life I feel so blessed to have on this planet.

"It is interesting that the solution is to replace the addiction with something positive. It seems so simple, but it works so well and is not simple at all—until we see it from the other side and realize, 'Gee, this is all I really had to do—change my perspective and live each day in the moment?'"

We don't go around preaching about ourselves; we preach Christ Jesus, the Lord. All we say about ourselves is that we are your servants because of what Jesus has done for us. For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made us understand that this light is the brightness of the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

But this precious treasure—this light and power that now shine within us—is held in nothing more than clay pots, that is, in our weak bodies. So everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own.

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken. We are perplexed, but we don't give up and quit. We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going. Through suffering, these bodies of ours constantly share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

—2 Corinthians 4:5-10 (Contributed by Maurine Pyle)

Mariellen: Thank you so much for sharing, Rhonda. This is wonderful, to know someone else who beat a substance addiction by learning to take care of herself. I wonder if men have the same motivation in getting addicted, and need the same sort of realignment women do? Do you have a sense for this?

Rhonda: Interesting you should ask that. Most (70%) of my clients are men. I had a session with one of them who has been addicted to alcohol since age thirteen. I told him our work wasn't going any further if he continued to drink. After a few years he called me and said, "I've been sober for 180 days. I have my AA pin to prove it. I want to come and do work with you now." At age 50 he had suffered problems with his liver and blood pressure. The doctor said he would not live if he continued to drink. He never drank again.

I asked him what motivated him to change so suddenly? He said, "The thought of seeing my parents in heaven (both recovered alcoholics) and having to explain why I had been drunk for all of my adult life. And I'm not ready to die, not like this."

We have worked together for a year now, and he has overcome much of his underlying depression and anxiety, which he knows he drank to cope with. He travels freely and spontaneously around the country and volunteers in our community. He has become much more social, often giving dinner parties. The other day he said, "I was sitting in my chair, looking out at Blanca (14,000 foot peak visible from his home) and thinking, 'I have a really good life.'" He started to cry. As we processed what had led to this transformation he said, "It was my stopping drinking, and our work together to help me be less anxious and more confident. You were right all those years ago when you said stopping the drinking was the key."

I asked if he ever had a craving to drink, if he had to actively choose not to? He said, "Never. I never want to go back there again, and I find I'm quite content with nonalcoholic beer. I don't need the alcohol anymore. I can see clearly now what it did to me."

Mariellen: So, for him it was a moment of truth that he let penetrate the fog of alcohol. You were part of that truth, and the doctor, and his parents, but basically, he became ready for the truth. Forty years of denial, and then truth. Once he'd decided to be sober, he became ready to work on himself, with your help.

It was basically the same pattern for your woman friend. She let in the truth one day, and having made that initial realization, she was able to move on to working on herself—later.

For both of them, part of the transformation was getting in touch with what they really enjoyed—riding her bike in her case, and for him, having nice dinner parties. He found other ways to get his socialization besides hanging out with his drinking buddies. She decided, also, to get a better class of friends.

What this all comes down to, as I see it, is that God met each of them right where they were...not that either one of them thinks of this in God-terms, but I do! Spirit showed them their addiction, right at the moment when they were ready to really look at themselves. Praise God!

Rhonda: Beautiful summary, and I think you're right on. God gives us what we need when we are ready for truth and healing. God is infinitely loving and patient in the meantime.

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August 2010

Questioning

Guest Editor: Judith Favor with Mike 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, 2010

February 2011

Prayer

Editor: Mike Resman

Pray always. (1 Thessalonians 5:17) Prayer can be so many things—conversation, petition, source of growth and fount of healing, to name a few. What happens when you pray? How has your prayer changed over time, and how has it changed your life? Share gifts you’ve received and miracles you witnessed. Have you ever prayed in ways that you regretted later? Tell us about the interior process that can form the center of life.

Deadline: November 15, 2010

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