



February 2024
Number 121 (2)

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*

Eco-Grief (Supplemental)

Inter-Species Mourning

Elizabeth Mitchell



Color version of Elizabeth Mitchell's multi-media art on page 5 in the print edition.

From the Editor:

This issue is an expression of our eco-grief, anxiety, frustration, anger, despair and acceptance. What may be surprising is the hope, joy, faith, trust, creativity, curiosity, and inspiration you will find in our authors' words. Together we will find our way through the challenges we face. We got more submissions than we could include in the 10-page print edition, so we offer this web edition in full color, accessed on our website <whatcanstthousay.org>.

Editor for this issue, Rhonda Ashurst

What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS) is an independent publication co-operatively produced by Friends with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. It is published in February, May, August, and November. The editorial and production team is Rhonda Ashurst, Muriel Dimock, Lissa Field, George Hebben, Lieselotte Heil, Judy Lumb, Grayce Mesner, Mike Resman, Earl Smith, and Eleanor Warnock.

Tell us your stories! **WCTS** is a worship-sharing group in print. We hope to help Friends be tender and open to the Spirit. Articles that communicate best to our readers focus on specific events and are written in the first person.

Although there are themes announced for most issues, we accept any expressions of mystical experiences or contemplative practice at any time.

We welcome submissions of articles of less than 1500 words and artwork suitable for black and white reproduction. Please send your text submissions in Word or generic text format and artwork in high resolution jpeg files. Photocopied art and typed submissions are also accepted.

Send via email to <wctseditors@gmail.com> or hard copy to **Rhonda Ashurst, PO Box 9032, Reno NV 89507.**

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The People Need A Spirit-Inspired Vision

Roger Burns

Where there is no vision, the people perish. -- Proverbs 29:18

Deep spirituality, or the lack thereof, has a relationship with the climate change crisis in a way that I have not seen widely discussed.

One challenge that is particular to climate change is that Mother Nature will respond to the behavior of humankind overall but will not be much affected by individual behavior. Your own health will be better if you don't smoke or indulge in other excesses. But if you, on your own, behave in a perfectly sustainable way as an individual, climate change will nevertheless continue and will affect your life in the same way that society overall is being affected.

I sorely wish we had a deeply spiritual charismatic leader who could help lead us out of this. A study from the University of Sydney has shown that within the context of today's fossil-fuel centered economy, a typical household's carbon footprint is strongly correlated with that household's monetary expenditures. In other words, every dollar that comes out of our pockets is killing the Earth. In today's economy, we have almost no place to spend our dollars that will contribute to what we know will be a fully sustainable outcome. This condition is so pervasive that an engineering class at M.I.T. has calculated that even a homeless beggar in the USA has an unsustainable carbon footprint, because the donations they receive are coming from an unsustainable economy.

Regarding climate change, Nature is responding to how we are living collectively. The challenge before us is that our society overall has no real idea of how to live sustainably. Even those few who go the full nine yards, who move to a wholly green farm, etc. hope that their lifestyle is genuinely sustainable, but for the most part, as near as I can tell, they do not know for certain that that is true. Moments come when a green farmer absolutely needs a tool of some kind, which today can come only from a manufacturer that is an intrinsic part of the fossil-fuel economy.

To now begin moving back to this essay's theme of deep spirituality, in the earliest days of America's Civil Rights Movement in the mid-20th century, Gandhian nonviolent resistance was not at first among the major options being considered for how to proceed forward, until after the arrival of Martin Luther King. A great many of the people who were oppressed by racial injustice started out with no particular interest in, or detailed familiarity with, Gandhi's nonviolent approach. But when the new leader Dr. King spoke, with his great intelligence, his undeniable compassion, his inspiring oral delivery, and his palpable willingness to give his life for the path that he was envisioning, he stirred something within his listeners that

drew them into wanting to try what he was calling for. Dr. King was possessed by deep spirituality. That is, he was inwardly connected to Something That Is Greater Than Us All.

There are a number of liberal people who believe that it is rude to speak publicly of spiritual realities, that such notions must clearly be no more than superstitions, talk of which will lead us away from rational thinking which is a necessity for human culture. They say we must instead focus solely on developing rationally-chosen values that are useful, and then live out those values. I must ask: how far has that gotten us up until now? After decades of lobbying governments for actions, few commitments have been made, and almost none of them are being sufficiently implemented. And all the while, the measurable effects of human activity on climate change have grown exponentially, devastatingly worse.

It brings some people comfort to believe that human beings are entirely rational creatures. I would suggest to those people that they might want to mentally step back a good distance, reflect deeply on people's behavior that we see, and reconsider how true that is. Many who strongly focus on rationality are certain that society's problems cannot benefit from a connection to Spirit. I don't know that that's true.

There are times when we find ourselves in a box, surrounded by four impenetrable walls. In many instances, a connection to Spirit will help us float up, out of the box, and enable us to see options that we couldn't see before.

There are leaders who will address spirituality as a concept and will use such a view to inform the values that they will rationally choose to live by. But when these leaders who are not invigorated by Spirit to speak to others about this, their words might resonate only with those who already agree with them. When someone allows Spirit to speak through them and that is shared with others, something different happens.

Dr. King addressed society's sins of racism, militarism, and economic exploitation. He called us to a different way of living our lives. While King's name is well known, his message is fading away in today's

society -- in the same way that we all know George Washington's name, but people today have almost no awareness of the specific vision of human society that Washington devoted his life to fighting for. To a sad degree, the same can be said of Jesus of Nazareth.

I do sorely wish that we had a Dr. King of the green movement -- a leader with a profound connection to Spirit, whose words and actions about humankind and Nature would resonate deeply with a great many people. I wish this because it may not be possible to adequately address climate change solely by recruiting individuals through rational arguments. It is our mass behavior that is destroying the Earth. Therefore, it is our mass behavior that needs to be changed. We need to collectively live differently than we're living now. And we do not know how to do that -- yet.

Without a vision, the people will perish.

Roger Burns has led the Friends Exploring Mysticism group that is sponsored by the Adelphi Friends Meeting in Maryland. He is the author of a biographical essay titled "Alice Paul and her Quaker Witness".

What Canst Thou Say? *has an email discussion group.*

What Canst Thou Say? sponsors an email discussion group on mystical experience and contemplative practice.

In May of 2020, Roger Burns, a WCTS reader, asked us to begin an email discussion group. Mike Resman and Judy Lumb of WCTS worked with Roger, who did the technical work of setting up the email discussion group.

Besides the email discussions of mystical experiences, the members of the WCTS editorial team use this email discussion group to remind our community of upcoming deadlines for future issues of WCTS.

If you are not already a member, please join by sending an email request to <WCTS.Owner@gmail.com> or Judy Lumb <judylumb43@gmail.com>.

Holding Space for Ecological Grief

Hayley Hathaway

Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW) is a network of Friends in North America addressing the climate crisis and environmental justice. In the Fall of 2022, QEW launched its first 10-week course on ecological grief. The course came after organizing two popular online workshops on the topic: over 200 Friends registered from across North America. At these workshops, Friends shared about feeling alone with their emotions of dread, fear, and sadness related to climate disruption. They were seeking a place to share. At QEW, we discerned that this kind of work spoke to our strengths: bringing friends together and creating contemplative spaces to connect on deep concerns.

Gayle Matson of Chico Meeting in California and I trained with the Good Grief Network, whose 10-step model offered a graceful entry into the topic of ecological grief. Their model is inspired by the 12-Step family groups and is designed to “help folks recognize, feel, and process their heavy emotions, so that these feelings may be transformed into meaningful action.”

Thirty people applied to our course, and thirteen people of diverse ages and geographies joined. Most of the people in the group had experience with climate activism, the facilitators included. We were used to asking ourselves, “what can I do?” In this space, we focused on asking, “how do I feel?” We used check-ins, poetry, queries, music, worship sharing-style reflection, journaling, and grounding exercises each week to dig into ten themes, like:

“Being with Uncertainty,”

“Grieving the Harm I have Caused,” and

“Reinvesting in Meaningful Efforts.”

One Friend shared about their experience in the course: “It was very enriching and healing to deeply share in a sacred space our concerns, fears,

sorrow, righteous anger, dreams, joy, and hope about the environment. It filled my heart with strength to hear the testimony of the inner struggle of other Friends. It made me feel less alone in this. It motivated me to share with people around me who are also suffering from all of this and who for the same reason are discouraged from making commitments, who fall into despair or worse.”

Britt Wray, author of ***Generation Dread***, writes, “Rather than bury our heads in the sand and suppress our discomfort, we can harness and transform the distress we feel into meaningful actions and forms of connection.” Our hope was to offer that discomfort the sacred attention it deserved and build connection in the process.

Hayley Hathaway is the former Publications Coordinator of QEW. This is reprinted with permission from **Befriending Creation** Volume 36, Number 1. Visit GoodGriefNetwork.org and QuakerEarthcare.org for more.

10-STEPS TO PERSONAL RESILIENCE & EMPOWERMENT IN A CHAOTIC CLIMATE

- 1 Accept the Severity of the Predicament
- 2 Be With Uncertainty
- 3 Honor My Mortality & the Mortality of All
- 4 Do Inner Work
- 5 Develop Awareness of Biases & Perception
- 6 Practice Gratitude, Witness Beauty, & Create Connections
- 7 Take Breaks & Rest
- 8 Grieve the Harm I Have Caused
- 9 Show Up
- 10 Reinvest in Meaningful Efforts

goodgriefnetwork.org

A Climate Grief Workshop

Jennifer Elam

On November 9, 2023, I was invited by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to lead a grief workshop for their climate stewards group. We addressed the grief experienced by those witnessing the climate catastrophes. How do we address grief and trauma of this magnitude?

The climate stewards asked questions and came together to address them. I want to share some of the group activities and queries in hope that others will be motivated to address climate-related grief together because the work is just too hard to do alone. Some possible group activities and resources:

Bringing our grief to the center of the circle

Introduction: Difference between thinking and feeling: we're not looking here for science or analysis or politics or rationale for feeling a certain way or commentary on our emotional state; we're looking for an expression of the state of our grief.

Visualization: Around the circle, visualize a circle; what speaks to you in the center? (light, spirit, fire, water, earth), hold the image in your mind that speaks to you as you take your turn. When we speak, we visualize each one of us walking to the center to offer something that we grieve for. "I grieve for..."

Reflection: Brief opportunity to reflect on the experience.

Create an Art Piece

Intro: Spirit-led art aka Art from the Cosmos-Bringing Hope to Humanity from the work of Matthew Fox and Brian Swimme.

Spend time with crayons/markers with paper. Do not think about what you will do to make the art. Just sit without thinking about it in a state of stillness and let your fingers do what they do on the paper. Then sit with it and write words that come as you meditate on the piece.

Practice providing a container to others for their stories of grief and hope

Introductory words: We can be of great use to others by creating space for them individually to share

their stories and express their feelings, of grief, despair, and hope. This requires bringing what we know about deep listening for truth to an interpersonal level. As listeners, we don't advise or interrupt with our own stories or questions of personal interest or worry about the other's state. We hold the container, remember their goodness, provide space for their feelings to show. As those who are being listened to, we take the opportunity to allow our deepest feelings to come out, in the knowledge that our unexpressed grief, fear and rage is keeping us from healing and being grounded in hope.

Pairs or trios: Practice both being the container and expressing our grief, with time clearly allotted to each person.

Reflections: What was this experience like? How did your listener help create the space for your story? What was it like to try to show up in this way?

Cultivating a discipline of hope

Early Quakers were clear about hope--creating the Kingdom of God on earth, great hope in things unseen. It seems harder today. Surrounded by superficial hope on one hand and despair on the other.

We're all familiar with a superficial hope (everything is fine, it will all work out somehow, let's just look at the bright side). We're reaching here for the real deal—a rooted, resilient, courageous hope that is not afraid of reality or heartache, that is grounded in spirit.

Despair, numbness, anger. Despair is not simply lost hope but happens when we judge the pain of the situation to be unbearable. There is no prospect for a better future. It is a lonely and passive place. Despair is also a sedative - oppressors use tactics to make the oppressed feel hopeless. Recognize that despair can be seductive.

Queries:

What is something you feel genuinely hopeful about (can be small)?

What routines or practices do you have that move you towards hope?

What practices/routines of yours move you toward

despair? (Think about who you spend time with, how you spend your time, what culture you consume, where you get your news, and what you talk about.) How do these aspects of your life impact your feelings of despair and/or of hope?

Grief:

Lamentations, 2:19

Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches!

Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord!

Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children who faint for hunger at the head of every street.

Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, pp. 304-306, excerpt

...The Spirit gathers up all this pain and releases it through us with sighs too deep for words. These sighs are not our own sighs, given articulation by the Spirit. They are the actual groanings of the Spirit within us, and they must be given articulation by us...

Our society has virtually no space for grief. We consume, work, seek entertainment or medicate. Yet we have to grieve--both to hope and to heal. Vengeance is aborted grieving. Truth and reconciliation commissions can be a way to grieve and heal, to come together and foster hope.

More Queries:

What is it like when something that could be repaired is discarded? What is lost?

What are our options when something is irreparably broken or thrown away? (recycle, grieve, memorialize, build anew...)

How have you seen the opportunity to grieve helping you or others find your way to solid ground?

What makes it hard to grieve open-heartedly?

How might developing those muscles aid you/us as activists?

What might a practice of lamentation look like among Friends?

How do you want to shift your relationship with hope and grief?

What might you introduce into your daily or weekly routine/workout regimen around hope and grief?

Moving forward:

Introduction: How might we take what we have tried here and what we have learned from this experience into our meetings, our families, other groups we are part of?

Pairs: Consider the opportunities before you and possible next steps you can take.

Dancing with Grief, Becoming Energized

Jennifer Elam

*I am a dancer
I was first traumatized as a toddler and became mute as a child.
My life story could not dance as it unfolded.
Dancing was seen as "sin" by those around me.
Once I learned to dance and move, beyond the grief and "sin,"
I could speak. I grew a voice.*

*I was told to "obey" authorities,
and everyone was the authority;
so, there was no me, as a separate human being.
I existed only for the collective,
and the power was solely in the hands
of those given "authority".
I had no God-given power to stand in; it had been taken.
I could not speak. I had no voice.
"Sin" and "authority" had*

*become distortions in my life;
and now, isn't this what has happened to our world?
"Sin" used to distort power and take mine, as God gave me.
"Obey authority" used to distort and take the power of many.
How do we respond NOW?*

*We learn to dance, literally and as metaphor.
We learn that each of us, every last one of us
has been given grief and the gift of power from God
that we are to use, to better our World.
How do we use that power?*

*I/we are to stand firmly in that power as God gave it to me/us,
share it when we have extra, when others need a bit more,
not giving up what is ours in God's order, but using it,
acknowledging the infinite supply when shared,
as in the Loaves and Fishes,
bringing each individual and the world
to Radical Equality and Freedom.*

*We dance with each other.
We give our lives to co-create with our Creator.
We build a new vision, a new movement based on that Vision.*

*What is that Vision?
The Vision begins with commitment to Service,
committing our lives and lifestyles to building a better world,
seeing our core values and assuring that our actions start there.*

*Dancing with ourselves to mend our own shattered hearts,
claiming what is rightly our own and letting go of all that is not;
dancing with each other to help mend the broken hearts of others,
living a life within a community of Love and Respect;
Dancing with the world to build lives and lifestyles that support
a New World, New Life for our World.*

*Dancing with Ourselves, Each Other,
Our Community/Country/World,
and Dancing with God, standing in the flow of the Holy Spirit
with Continuing Revelation, where the energy for Co-creation with Spirit is
infinitely available, for the asking and commitment.*

*I stand in the center of the room, ready to make these commitments;
Commitments to Co-Create with the Creator,
bringing Love and New Life, Lives with Possibilities,
Evolution beyond Distortions, Grief, Trauma, and Self-Destruction.*

*The micro and the macro learn to Dance;
The personal becomes the universal;
the Universal becomes the Personal.*

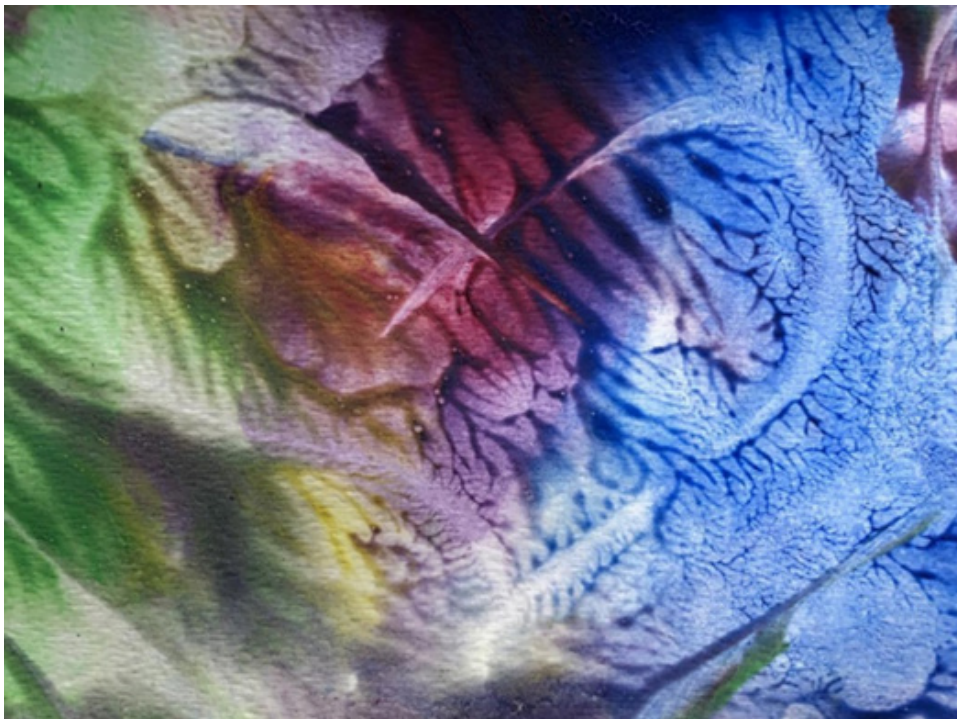
Will you join me in the dance?

Civil War of the Heart: Broken Hearted with Grief



*New Life Possibilities
Emerging from the
Noosphere,
the Ultimate Civil
Conversations
with the Universal Braver
Angels*

*(from an Art Show created for
Braver Angels 2023)*



Jennifer Elam began her study of psychology in 1969 and has been immersed in Quaker ministry for 25+ years. She is presently following leadings to use her life-time of work in psychology, spirituality and social justice to develop classes/workshops, using creative media – writing/poetry, dance and visual art - as led by Spirit for healing of personal and intergenerational traumas <jenelam.com>. Her workshops currently are “Mediating Trauma through Creative Expression” and since the publication in June of 2022 of her Pendle Hill Pamphlet, **Hillbilly Quaker**, she has been leading workshops on “Identities.” For more information, contact <jenelam@aol.com>.

Volunteer Layout Editor Needed

Judy Lumb

I have been doing the layout for **WCTS** for 20 years. I turned 80 last March and am slowing down. It is time for me to turn over this responsibility to someone else. I am willing to help someone new take over this responsibility, so we can do it together for a while. If you already do layout or want to learn, this is your opportunity. Contact me at <judylumb43@gmail.com>.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Please send this form to: **WCTS** c/o George Hebben,

2811 West B Ave, Plainwell MI 49080-8601

Enclosed is my check to *What Canst Thou Say?*

_____ \$ 10 for a one-year subscription

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_____ \$ 20 for any set of 20 issues (1-20, 21-40, etc.)

_____ \$ 1.50 for individual past issues

Enclosed is a contribution of \$ _____

I cannot afford \$10, enclosed is \$ _____

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May 2024
Spiritual Unity of All Life
Editor: Janice Stensrude

H. B. Jeffery wrote, "One of the first lessons required in true mysticism is to apprehend the full meaning of universal brotherhood; and the very first step that everyone must take in 'living the life' is to accept the fact of the spiritual unity of all beings as the fundamental principle of existence." Have you had an experience of the spiritual unity of all life? How has it informed your life?

Deadline: February 15, 2024

August 2024
Receiving Help Gracefully
Editor: Earl Smith

If it is more blessed to give than receive, what happens when you are the one in need? If everyone seeks blessings for giving, who is available to receive? Has there been a time when your need was as great or greater than your ability to give? Did you willingly surrender to this unfamiliar feeling, or did you find it too distressing? How did you reconcile your situation?

Deadline: May 15, 2024

November 2024
Rivers and Waterfalls
Editor: Judy Lumb

How does water in the form of creeks, streams, rivers, waterfalls, or even seas interact with your mystical life?

Have you had mystical experiences with water, or received messages through water imagery? Please share your water mysteries.

Deadline: August 15, 2024

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c/o George Hebben
2811 West B Avenue
Plainwell MI 49080-8601

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(Supplemental)