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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

A Full-time Career

Mike Resman

Some years ago I retired to pursue a new career—praying. This might seem somewhat abstract and of questionable utility, given that I was stepping away from serving children with disabilities. Yet, for those who believe in the power of prayer, there's benefit in engaging in it full time.

Prayer for me began quite simply. I was invited to adopt a spiritual discipline as part of a spiritual nurture program. I chose daily prayer, and for a year didn't put much effort into it. Some days, I forgot. Others, I spent only a few minutes saying "Hi" to God or rushing through a list of requests.

Reporting back to others in my group month after month that I was a slacker pushed me to become more deliberate. Prayer times expanded to twenty, then forty-five minutes, and I found myself at peace, resting in God's arms. I'd start by praying for a list of people, then sought simply to be with the One.

When it came time to retire, I re-read Brother Lawrence, wishing I could pray continually. I focused on Brother Lawrence's efforts to continually think about and talk with God. I quickly discovered that I lack the discipline to keep turning my mind to God.

Instead I prayed more informally, seeking God in my surroundings as I went about my daily activities. I continued the practice of beginning prayer sessions asking for God's mercy for a list of people. This pulled me into a deep silence, sometimes for several hours.

Prayer walks in a local park helped me reach through the veil between this world and the next. Cross stitching while listening to sacred choral music brought peace and joy.

After six months I discovered that I was praying continually, but not with my mind. My heart was constantly turned to my Beloved.

Brother Lawrence had said, "...I regarded God as the goal and end of all the thoughts and affections of my soul." I'd focused on believing I had to think about and talk with

God all the time and became discouraged when I couldn't. What I could do was love God, always. How encouraging, that there is this sweet path of heart-prayers that can lead to living continually in God's presence.

Billions of people pray to the Divine in a myriad of ways. For me, the most important aspect of prayer is its intention. When we pray to overcome illness—or the opposing football team—we remain rooted on this earth. When we seek to connect with God, to love God, we can be transported.

Perhaps you're thinking that this sounds quite self-absorbed, and wonder what good prayer efforts do for the world. I have "seen" a spiritual wind blowing through me, as it blows through each of us. As it does we alter it for good or ill and affect our surroundings. Am I adding peace, harmony, compassion and forgiveness to the world, or their opposites?

When I'm praying—clinging to the One—I'm content in being a vessel for good, whether or not my efforts are visible or even understandable to others.

Mike Resman is an editor of WCTS, and author of Pendle Hill pamphlet # 390, "Special Education as a Spiritual Journey."

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 these few pages. Those that didn't fit here can be found on our web site <whatcanstthousay.org>.

Mike Resman

Opening the Heart

Judy Leshefka

I was in a dilemma. Someone I love very much was under a great deal of stress and expressing it with angry outbursts. I'll call the person Y. Though I wasn't the target, I became very upset at Y's abusive behavior. I tried my best to understand Y's behavior, but I could feel my heart hardening after each of these incidents. Y became very defensive when I tried talking about the behavior. I didn't know what to do and prayed about it.

I decided to try the Buddhist practice of Loving Kindness. After one takes a few intentional breaths into the heart area, the meditation begins with offering loving kindness to oneself. While continuing to breathe into the heart space, three to four phrases are silently repeated three times, such as, "May I be at peace," "May I be well," "May my heart be open," "May the open heart extend to all beings." Then one calls to mind a loved one, directing the same phrases towards that person, "May you be at peace...." Then one's family, friends, community are sent loving kindness. Next a person with whom one is having difficulty is brought to mind and the phrases are

Prayer is something more than that which we do with our minds. It involves our hearts and spirits—that deeper part of our personalities to which only the Spirit of Jesus has access. Prayer in its highest form requires more than conscious effort. It also requires the surrender of our innermost selves to Jesus, giving him permission to make our lives a continually flowing fountain of unceasing prayer. When we have learned how to do that, we will have discovered the secret of the prayer of the heart.

—Robert V. Dodd, *Praying the Name of Jesus*

sent to that person. Finally the world is sent loving kindness.

This is a general schema; there are countless variations. I think of Loving Kindness as similar to "Holding Someone in the Light." For me the structure of the meditation helps make the Quaker practice more tangible.

In working with my feelings towards Y, I began by sending Loving Kindness toward myself, breathing into my heart and repeating the above phrases, wishing for an open heart. I then would visualize Y and send the same intentions. I did this for a few weeks. In time, I could feel my heart softening, and I became better able to suspend judgment and could be more loving around Y. Miraculously Y's reactivity began to mellow, and Y was

able to talk with me about the difficulty of being out of control. After a few months, Y's outbursts were greatly diminished both in quantity and quality, and our relationship deepened.

I used this same technique with a person from my Meeting, who had many redeeming qualities but who occasionally was very caustic towards others. In time, my relationship with this person changed from aversion to friendship.

The potency of this technique has brought home to me the fact that we all are connected in the Spirit and that we consciously or unconsciously have an effect on each other. By working with our own prejudices, resistances and judgments, we also can help release others from their suffering and give them the space to heal from their wounds. We begin by calling upon that of God in ourselves and then recognize the Divine in others.

Now, I need to start visualizing certain politicians.

Judy Leshefka has been a member of La Jolla Monthly Meeting in San Diego for 25 years. Her spiritual practice has been enriched by her Catholic roots, Quakerism as her chosen religion, and Buddhist practices. She has taught mindfulness meditation for over 12 years.



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Holding Others in the Light

Greg Woods

During a time of struggle after a particularly painful breakup, I read a *Pendle Hill Pamphlet*, “Holding One Another in the Light,” by Marcelle Martin. Martin says the act of holding a person in the Light “may involve lifting up specific requests on behalf of someone else, or simply joining with God’s constant love for that person.”¹ After reading this pamphlet, I began feeling the need to pray for my old girlfriend. Thereafter every time I thought of her, I would try to hold her in the Light, instead of mentally calling her a name. In Quakerism, we believe that everyone has the Inner Light of God within her or him. In the middle of praying for her, other familiar names or faces would come to me, and I started praying for them as well.

Before reading this pamphlet, I usually prayed for myself and a couple close family members and friends. All of the prayers were personal pleas, like “Please make this or that happen.” When the prayers went unanswered, I doubted the entire existence of God. However, out of this rough time, during which I also faced unemployment and several moves around the country, I discovered that I became a much stronger person, both spiritually and mentally. Like the country singer Garth Brooks, now I thank God for these unanswered prayers, because if anything had happened differently, I would not be the person I am today.

Martin says, later in her pamphlet, “Prayer on behalf of others is mysterious, but fundamentally it seems to be an opportunity to participate in divine love.”² When I pray now, I also try

to avoid making specific requests, because I do not and try not to understand the mystical ways of the Divine. Instead, I try to care for the person and “participate in divine love” of her or him.

The act of holding others in the Light has now become part of my daily routine; usually either when I wake up or before I fall asleep. Sometimes people will ask me to pray for them; other times I will pray for people I know are in a crisis; occasionally when I am praying, names and/or faces will appear to me, and I will include these people in my prayers. In this form of praying, I try to imagine lifting the person into a palm of bright light that engulfs him or her, like an encompassing halo of light. I imagine this light as God embracing the person. I know this visualization is not exactly consistent with my image of God, but this imagery keeps me focused on the specific act of praying for each individual.

When I pray for other people, I begin to center and slowly arrive at a place of deep meditation, when I can sit longer in waiting to hear Divine messages and revelations. Over time, I have realized that I have reached a calmer place in my worship than I had previously; I am completely open to God’s love. In Quakerism, we believe that each person can have a personal relationship with God without the need for an intermediary, like a pastor, and we are open to the continuing revelations that come from this relationship. Now, through this daily practice, I continue deepening my relationship with God and opening myself to love others unconditionally.

Greg Woods, a member of Columbia (Missouri) Friends Meeting, lives in rural northeast Missouri at the moment, waiting for his next leading.

Left-hand Prayer

Laurie Tucker

All my life, I have sought a way to be with God in prayer. I have often been stymied by how God has been portrayed to me by my church. As my images of God have evolved, so has my prayer life. Now that I am in my fifties, I have found an image of God and a way to pray that have opened new and deep spiritual avenues for me.

I grew up in the Southern Presbyterian Church, run by and dominated by men. The only available image of God was male, elderly, white-haired, in a navy blue suit and tie. God was really busy running the world and was not to be bothered with the needs and wants and fears of a small child—much like the fathers in our lives. So I was taught to pray only praise, only thanksgiving, in beautiful words and correct form. Supplication was done in careful, indirect language, but honest feelings, fears, and doubts were not encouraged. I was taught God was not really open to hearing my truth.

As children we are taught the concept of God as Father or Mother, and we often recreate God in the image of our own parents. For me this was a source of great fear. My grandfather was a sociopath who tortured and raped me throughout my childhood and adolescence. My father and mother knew of his actions, and because of their own weakness and fear, did nothing, causing me to endure in silence, with no resources, for many years. Believing Father God would harm me and be immune to my cries and fears, I could not risk praying.

As an adult, I longed to talk with God, but years of being held responsible for the misbehaviors of the adults in my life convinced me that God would only judge and reject me. My longing, however, was too strong to ignore. I began to use my frequent participation as a worship leader in church to pray to

Martin, Marcelle, 2006. *Pendle Hill Pamphlet* # 382, p. 1.
² Martin, *ibid*, p. 6.

God. My spoken prayers often moved fellow worshippers, and I was asked to consider attending seminary. But I cheated in those prayers. I prayed on behalf of many people, never myself. I never claimed my truth or my needs. I quickly learned to write unison prayers, because speaking the prayer aloud and by myself made it personal and overwhelming. I would dissolve into tears, an unseemly act in the stoic Presbyterian tradition.

In my forties, I began psychotherapy. As I began to heal from the severe trauma, my image of God changed from severe critic and judge to a God of Love. I began to risk bringing what I really felt to God—the anger, the hurt, the bafflement, the wonder, and the joy of growing health. My prayers became very personal, but I still longed for more. This was one-way communication; I longed for a conversation, in real time, with God. I had questions no embodied person could answer for me. I wanted to ask God my questions and receive an answer from him.

My therapist suggested using a technique, called non-dominant hand-writing, to help me connect with my inner child, who had been cut off and separated from the adult me for so many years. In the technique, a person writes a thought or question with his or her dominant hand, then moves the pen to the non-dominant hand and writes whatever appears in his or her mind. This technique proved very effective in helping me connect to all parts of myself. When I continued to ask questions that only God could answer, my therapist suggested I try this technique as a way to have a conversation with God.

I had hard questions I wanted to ask. I needed to know if my grandfather, who was never stopped or punished in his earthly life, had had to stand before God at his death. Did God offer him mercy, or justice? I wanted to know why God had not intervened

I trust in the same powerful God that his holy arm and power will carry me through whatever he has yet for me to do. That he will be my strength and support and the bearer up of my head unto the end; and in the end, I know his faithfulness and goodness. I have experienced of his love to whom be glory and powerful dominion forever. Amen.

—Margaret Fell
Contributed by Maurine Pyle

or sent someone to support me through those long years. I wanted to know what justice would look like for me, since I could no longer confront the man who had done such harm to me. I wanted to know how God could let an innocent child be so brutalized.

God's reply, through my left hand, assured me that my grandfather (Pa) would have to stand before him, confess, and repent. God told me that because my grandfather had not yet shown remorse, he was removed from the life stream, feeling the extreme loneliness of exclusion. I was told Pa would re-enter life when he had experienced all the harm he had done. Part of his experience would be to know intimately the level of terror and horror I felt. I felt deep relief hearing these words. I felt God understood the horror of my experience, the harm Pa had done, and true to his promise, was providing justice on my behalf.

Other conversations with God did not always give me what I wanted to hear. Asking God how he could love this man required me to change my view, to see that my grandfather was also a hurt and fearful child. He took that hurt and fear and let it grow into malevolence, but he was still God's beloved child, just as I am.

Left-handwriting conversations with God have proven very powerful in my life. Now I can take anything to God, everything to God, and sit with him as I would a beloved and wise mentor. We can talk to one another. God is now a wise, beloved friend who cares more deeply than I can imagine about every part of his creation.

How can I know this is God rather than the workings of my own mind? Several reasons are apparent to me. First, the left-hand writings come from a source much wiser, much more compassionate, much more understanding than I could ever claim to be. The feelings of anger and hurt that color so much of my own thinking are not present. The power of deep and abiding love is always present.

Second, I do not always receive an answer I want to hear, but a larger truth that requires me to move out of my egocentric point of view. I'm not always happy or satisfied with the answers God gives; they do always ask me to have more compassion and a wider perspective than I possess at the moment. I cannot believe that my own mind would challenge me in such ways. Surely if these were only my thoughts, I would uphold and support all my egotistical views of the world and my life.

Finally, in these conversations, I feel an intense love and well-being present in my body. There is peace; something I know little of. There is joy. There is an unburdening of my heart combined with the knowledge of being truly heard and accepted. I cannot offer that to myself, but God offers it to each of us every moment. I realize that I am in the presence of Love. The moments of writing with God are deeply grace-filled for me.

Laurie Tucker has grown beyond her Presbyterian roots and has been blessed to encounter wise teachers along her path. She is a truth seeker.

With Gratitude for What We Have

David Blair

The most powerful prayer and the most illustrious action, both arise out of a pure heart. ... And what constitutes a pure heart? It is unencumbered, without worry and not attached to things.

Look deeply into things and discover God there. —Meister Eckhart

I pray in many ways and for many reasons.

In the spring of 1998 I prayed out of despair: “Lord, I have made such a mess of my life. I don’t ask anything for myself. If you take me tonight, that’s fine. But if I live, please may I bring no more harm to others.” Shortly after this prayer, my life shifted and opened and I found new life. Perhaps my prayer was powerful because I wasn’t asking for myself.

In March of 2007 my wife Linda was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She died three months later. Through these months, I prayed often. I asked for a cure if that was possible and for her healing in any case. Linda died peacefully and my sense was that she had found, on some level, a healing. Were my prayers answered? I hope so.

In 2008 I married Lina, Linda’s and my best friend from our time in the Philippines. Lina had been through cancer three times. Before asking Lina to marry me, I prayed a lot. One morning, I began to cry and I asked God: “Am I crazy to marry a woman who has had cancer three times when I’ve just lost Linda to cancer?” As I prayed and confessed my fear, the fear lifted from me. Shortly after, I proposed and was accepted. The fear has not returned. I pray for Lina’s continuing health and for long and healthy years for us both. This is what I am asking for. I also know that God doesn’t al-

ways give me what I ask for wrapped the way I’d like it. Still, I ask for this, with gratitude for what we have right now.

Prayer has helped us talk to each other. We began to fall in love as we prayed over our meals. When we talked over the phone, we always ended with prayer. Speaking to God, we are honest about our feelings and don’t hide from each other. When we’ve had tough things to talk about, we often talk about them to God in each other’s presence. We ask God’s forgiveness, and each other’s, for hurting each other. We also tease each other in prayer, and laugh. I think God laughs with us.

Metta is a form of prayer—asking blessings for all beings, beginning with myself, then my family, going out in circles to friends, spiritual teachers, people I hardly know. I have found words that work for me and often say metta while walking. Metta has become a form of meditation—my mind wanders off, then returns to the familiar words and the thoughts of others. It is sometimes a way to open and connect

to others: at these moments I have felt my chest aching, as my heart becomes full. Sometimes I feel God’s presence strongly as I say metta.

I have been reading Catherine of Siena and Meister Eckhart at night since 1987, alternating each month. The passages are so familiar now and sometimes rote. Yet the text and the prayers can still surprise me if I meditate on them and am honest about what I see in myself. This too is a form of prayer.

The quote at the start comes from a daily reading titled “The Art of Prayer” in an Eckhart reader. “Look deeply into things and discover God there.” Perhaps this is the essence of prayer: finding God in our daily life, and giving thanks.

David Blair has lived and worked in China, the Philippines and Vietnam. His inner journey has taken him to even more amazing places. David now directs the Mariposa Museum and World Culture Center in Peterborough, NH, a museum that brings the world to New England’s doorstep in service of a peaceful and connected world <mariposamuseum.org>.

Farewell, Evelyn Feliciano

David Blair

Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano died on August 26, 2010 at the age of 69. I met her in 2009 when my wife Lina and I visited Evelyn and her husband David on their small farm south of Manila. I knew of her as a famous author with a deep understanding of the Filipino culture and of the Christian path, and an elegant command of English. I got to know her as a fellow seeker, a woman of great knowledge and faith who was still open to explore, to learn, to go deeper.

On a long walk one night we talked of meditation and she told me she’d like to spend more time in stillness. She was curious about Friends and Buddhism. I introduced her to WCTS? and she began to write. It was a joy to hear her voice in this new and different forum. I chuckled to read her November, 2009 article about malling—a new word for most American readers, and a concept that must have seemed foreign to many of us! Before she died, Evelyn texted a friend: “I’ve never been more at peace with God and self than now, despite indescribable pain. I can feel His deep presence and ultimate joy. Am so privileged to enjoy Him.” To know more about Evelyn <littworld.org/aroundtheworld.asp?r_id=2&p=41&i=42#26:open:overview>

Leaving It Up To God, Now

Lynn Kirby

My mother taught me to say grace at mealtimes and bedtime prayers and blessings (“God bless Mommy and Daddy and Dennis”). I went to a religious school where memory classes taught more rote prayers. And in church, each week the pastor would pray, on behalf of all members of the congregation, the prayer specified in his liturgical calendar.

We were also taught that we could pray for what we wanted, such as, “Please, God, make my parents give me a kitten,” or, “Please make the sun shine on Saturday so we can go to the beach.”

I found these types of prayer satisfying for a long time. My bedtime prayers brought a sense of completion to the day, and saying grace at meals just seemed right. Hallelujahs and prayers of praise filled me with joy and reverence.

But as I grew older, awareness grew in me that the pastor’s prayers very rarely had to do with current world or local issues or with my own personal life. Instead, a very strong emphasis was put on how sinful we are and how we can never be good enough to deserve God’s love. Most of our prayer was based on fear, consisting of asking for forgiveness and begging for God’s mercy.

Gradually, I stopped seeing God as an old man in the sky, granting wishes or meting punishments at whim. The nature of my prayers changed when I began to realize that I had neither God’s breadth of understanding nor any faultless solutions for life’s problems. I have come to see prayers of praise as uplifting for me, but not something that God needs. My petitionary prayer is for strength, wisdom, understanding, or compassion. I pray that God will show me how to live in love and with trust, and I try to remain open to God’s will.

If someone is in need, I don’t ask for a particular outcome, but for the best solution, as seen from an eternal point of view. I try to join in God’s love for that person. In silence, I send good thoughts and love to that individual. Sometimes I perform tonglin, the Buddhist practice of breathing in their pain, breathing out lovingkindness and compassion.

Meditation, practicing gratitude and acceptance have made me feel more at peace with God, life, and my small role in the whole scheme of things. I am not afraid (except when I’m near a cliff’s edge). I don’t need to have the answers and I don’t need to tell God how to operate. Isn’t that lucky?

Civilization is littered with unsolved problems, baffling impasses. The best minds of the world are at the end of their tether. The most knowledgeable observers of our condition are badly frightened. The most relevant contribution that Christians make at these points of impasse is the act of prayer—determined, repeated, leisurely meetings with the personal and living God. New life is conceived in these meetings.

—Eugene H. Peterson, from his book *Earth & Altar*

Peace Prayer: A Bowl

Lynn Kirby

*May I live as an open bowl:
When empty, to receive
gratefully
whatever I’m given.
When full, to hold gently;
to offer all I have
knowing I will be filled
again.*

Lynn Kirby is a member of Stevens Point Friends Meeting (Wisconsin), part of Northern Yearly Meeting. Retired, she works on sustainability issues in her community and state.



Nightmare, and A Blessing

This poem contains images that may trigger someone with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Mariellen Gilpin

My friend has terrible memories.
They wake her up at night.
I have memories, too.
*Grandmother: "Mommy will have to go to the hospital
Unless you are very good."*
*New electric fence.
Bzzz zap.
Bzzz zap.
Cow touches fence,
Jumps back, tears in her eyes.
Cow weighs 1300 pounds.
Mother: "Hold the nice new fence, Honey."
I look at her. She nods encouragement.
Must be very good;
Mommy might have to go to the hospital.
I toddle forward.
I'm knocked down by the current.
Mother giggles,
Tells her joke whenever family is together.
Disabled by strokes,
A light still comes to her eyes
When someone says,
"Wasn't there something about an electric fence?"
Bzzz zap.
Bzzz zap.
Memories.
Some doctors call the vivid body memories hallucinations
Because they're not really happening.
Right then, anyway.
Not really.
I call them memories.*

My friend is having surgery.
The doctor will repair some of the damage
Her raped, tortured, beaten body endured.
She will drift in a sleep-wake state
For several days.
She is fearful—
Memories.

I promise I will sit with her—
Talk when she feels like it,
Pray for her while she sleeps,
Guard her from memories.

*We talk.
She sleeps.
I pray.
She stirs;
Says, "I feel peace."
She sleeps.*

*I see
Dancing points of Light
Around her,
Above her.
Five feet around her sleeping form.
She is surrounded by Light.
She is blessed—
I am healed.
Memories.*

Mariellen Gilpin is a member of Urbana-Champaign meeting, Illinois, and an editor of WCTS. She has PTSD. She sometimes wonders if all abused people have mystical experiences—do we need more encouragement than others?

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

Mariellen Gilpin, Editor

"DISCOVERING GOD AS COMPANION underlines the power of 'we' sustained by the Religious Society of Friends for more than 350 years. Contributing Friends and companions of God have drawn so close to the Source of Love that Light streams through their written words into the world. Through the testimonies of these writers, readers can glimpse contemplative witness as one mark of the whole Quaker community." —Judith Favor's review in *Friends Journal*

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A Corona of Prayers

Barbara Clearbridge (*shulamith eagle*)

Recently I came across a translation of the Muslim call to prayer: “Allahu akbar!”—God is greatest! (Repeat four times) “Hayya ala-l-falah!”—Come, come to the highest spiritual realization! (Repeat twice) I thought about what my life would be like if five times a day a chant calling everyone to prayer rose throughout my town and I dropped everything I was doing; if I stopped in mid-keystroke, or mid-sentence, and fell to the ground to pray. What would our American culture be like if we all did that?

So I started setting a timer on the days I worked at home. Ding-ding-ding, stop everything, remember God. I found I wasn’t able to sit quietly in waiting worship at the sound of the timer; I was too enmeshed in whatever I’d been doing. It would be different if I recited a set group of prayers, as in Islam, but I prefer waiting worship. Instead, I developed four affirmations to repeat. After I had practiced this for a few weeks I felt the lesson had got in deep enough, and I no longer wanted to be interrupted just to do affirmations, so I ended this practice.

One day last month I had an extra fifteen minutes between clients. “Great,” I said to myself, “Sit down and worship.” I wondered if Muslims were doing the same thing at that moment, but I didn’t want to spend the time thinking about time zones. Then I thought of all the monks and nuns who pray frequently throughout the day; surely some of them were sitting then, too. The orthodox Jews prayed

*I felt companioned
by millions.*

three times a day; they lived in every time zone... there were people in synagogues and churches and mosques all over the world sitting, praying, right then. More than that, others were coming out after prayer, and others were on their way in to pray, putting on or taking off special garments, walking thoughtfully, driving, some with their families...

The world zoomed away from me and I could see it as if from space. There was a halo of light all around it made of all the prayers radiating out, a shimmering corona of prayers, of thoughts of God, surrounding Earth and rising from it.

Usually I am very aware of the violence and cruelty and stupidity permeating the planet. There is a sort of smog of horrifying emotions, thoughts and actions I have to shut out of my perception because it overwhelms me. During this vision, I could see that, too, but it was a much smaller ring. It was thin, close to the surface of Earth, and crumbly. It was colored angry red and black, like a wound. But it was completely dwarfed by the magnificent shine of the prayers encircling the planet. What’s the opposite of overshadowed? It was...enlightened. I felt hope. There really was an ocean of light to swallow up the ocean of darkness.¹ I felt companioned by millions of people, linked to all these unknown friends. We all sat together making the entire Earth a house of God. Every moment someone, many someones, were making that light.

Whenever I sit in waiting worship the room expands to include everyone praying everywhere. Now I am sure that worldwide change is possible.

¹George Fox’s vision described in his journal.

Tell Us Your Stories!

What Canst Thou Say is a worship-sharing group in print. We welcome submissions of articles of 350-1500 words and artwork—line drawings or 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 <mariellen.gilpin@gmail.com>, or diskette or hard copy to **WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820.**

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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.

Stuck in a State of Prayer

Eric Sabelman

On Saturday, on my way to work in the garden, I got stuck in a state of prayer.

I had felt it coming on: a very large, wide prayer rising up from deep inside.

It reached my conscious self, the level where I form it into words. It began:

“O, Thou....” “O, Thou...”

But there I was stuck, without the words to say the part that came next; I tried a lot of combinations and none were adequate:

“O, Thou Creator of earth and sea and sky...”

“O, Thou Giver of all gifts...”

“O, Thou God of grace and God of glory ... grant us wisdom, grant us courage for the living of each hour...”

Each was closer, but still far from complete (and the last was lifted from a hymn not my own).

I moved from one part of the garden to another, trying out new endings; in each place, I stood immobilized while searching for the right words, and got no gardening done.

All the words I know are not enough.

I came to have an appreciation for Jesus’ wisdom in giving us what we call the Lord’s Prayer, not for the purpose of a preacher leading his congregation in reciting it, but as practical advice should you become stuck in a state of prayer: “If you need words for your prayer and none come, you might try these. Then you can go on with whatever else you have to do.”

Begin with “Our Father, Who art in heaven...,” continue through “... for Thine is the Kingdom...,” and you will very likely have said the words you needed.

Islam has something similar. I am told the Prophet gave his follow-

ers the 99 Names of God: “O, Thou Merciful...,” “O Compassionate...,” “O Light...” Say all 99, and you will very likely have said the words you needed. (I am also told Muhammad gave the 100th Name only to his camel, so that men could not claim to know everything.)

My prayer is still incomplete: “O, Thou...” leads to too many words of hope and thanks and praise to choose between. “O, Thou who knows my soul, who hears it speak what I cannot say...”

Saying this makes it feel less incomplete: I give this to you, in case you too are ever stuck in a state of prayer.

Eric E. Sabelman gave this message in worship on January 26, 1997. He is in the process of publishing a collection of his ministries.



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>.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

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(See instructions for authors on page 7)



May 2011

Animals

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

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

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Prayer