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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*

Meaning from Despair (Expanded)

Hard Lessons

Michael Resman

Some may believe that to step onto the spiritual path results in contemplating meadows of wild flowers and butterflies under a gentle sun. One's spiritual journey may produce bliss. But spirituality is not for the faint-hearted, for lessons can also be learned from the depths of despair.

Early in my journey I was shown the glory of God, followed by a clear vision of my own flaws and limitations. The contrast was raw and deep. After several weeks of these contrasting visions I was in such pain from seeing my own imperfections that I prayed aloud—something I never did. I pleaded with God to lift my pain, because I couldn't take any more.

Immediately, the burden was lifted from my heart and I was comforted. The agony I'd known when shown my limitations was powerful enough to teach me a life lesson. It might be tempting to think that having mystical experiences makes me special, but I know better. I need to walk in humility.

From The Editors:

This issue speaks to how we can grow through our despair. Pain is part of life. We pray that you can walk through yours, gaining what you can. Eventually we will meet in a blessed meadow.

There were too many poignant submissions to accommodate within our print version, so we have also produced an expanded web version which can be downloaded from <whatcanstthousay.org/extras.html>

Anne Scherer, Guest Editor
Michael Resman, WCTS Editor

The God of Wet Things

Glynis Lumb

I hadn't wanted to go to meeting that day. I had been feeling lumpy and vulnerable. I felt like I had been asking for an answer to my concern regarding our new clerk of meeting. It had been a quiet meeting.

I began to center down. It was an easy day, but I was aware of everyone in the room, like we were all one. I sat between Creedle and Mala in the second row. I felt a pulling and heaviness at my right side, toward Mala, who is often in pain and I thought I was feeling her message. So I sat with it and tried to lean into the feeling, to surround it and be it. Then I felt it let up and a heavy burden was on my head, pushing me down, like an elephant had sat down upon my head. I was very disturbed by it, but put love into it and tried to feel its weight with love. But, I was definitely overwhelmed and uncomfortable. Then, it let loose and I was light, very light, as if we were all light rather than heavy. And my eyes saw brightly, like the sun had come out.

Then the vision formed almost straight away. It began with a cool, clear sparkling water. I was there in the water and viewing it at the same time. It was so clear, and sweet, and surrounded by warm rock. It was an endless pool of sparkling water. Then the vision grew in size as if I were no longer having the view of just one being, but of many, of every sentient being on Earth. My body was gone and I was lifted up with urgency and the words began to form to describe the vision and the emotion that was flowing through the body of the message.

There is a term we use, "way will open." And this is how it is coming to me today. *There are aquifers deep down below the surface of the earth. They are cool, clear, sparkling, and pure. It takes hundreds of years to become this pure. The water filters down through rocks and dirt. It filters through grass, flowers, trees, and air, even through our bodies. It must filter through everything in order to be this clean. And it is gentle. It is patient.*

What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS)

is an independent publication by and for Quakers with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. It is published in August, November, February, and May. The editorial and production team is Lissa Field, Mariellen Gilpin, Lieselotte Heil, Richard Himmer, Judy Lumb, Grayce Mesner, Mike Resman, 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 best communicate to our readers focus on specific events and are written in the first person. We welcome submissions of articles 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 <mariellen.gilpin@gmail.com> or hard copy to **WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820.**

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This is the meaning of “way will open.” And it is gentle.

I sat down exhausted and not relieved of the message. I wept like my mother had died, for what seemed like a long time. My body could not find grounding. I couldn’t sit in the chair. I stood up and walked around to the back of the room and lay down on the floor as flat as I could. My hands at my side like in yoga. I cried some more. I listened and took solace in the fifty some odd Friends holding the presence in the room. I waited for someone else to finish the message for me so I could be relieved. Finally, a woman stood up and shared a message about a cat. About how our Quaker meeting was like many cats going around doing

the vision ... was too big for my small frame ... I had felt such beauty and truth ...

whatever they wanted and assuming others should care as much for their actions. I laughed and was astonished by her truth. She seemed exasperated.

As meeting came to a close, I realized I couldn’t get grounded because the vision I had was too big for me. It felt as if the message was too big for my small frame. Words were not able to describe what I had experienced. I sat with a friend in privacy for a bit after this and tried to use words to communicate what had happened. I was like someone who had been through a near death experience.

I had felt such beauty and truth manifested and yet it was so far from what felt like here and now. It felt like the earth was being raped and that it was my own mother. It was terrible. The answer was wrapped up in sorrow and urgency to speak the truth. The vision included the gentle hand of God,

of the energy that loves and enlivens all things. The gentle strength of water being a part of all things, ever flowing and telling us that we are all connected and what flows through one person flows through us all. The water must remain sacred and pure. It must be left alone deep under the rocks and clay. Clean water is essential to life.

The only way for me to settle would be to continue to visualize this image of all that was wrong and all that was right. The beauty of all living things was being brutally attacked by the simple act of not waiting gently for a way forward. The violence of this was echoed in our very way of being with one another and with the Earth in the United States. There is violence in our search for fuel, minerals, oil, and coal. There is violence in the way we torture suspects for their secrets. There is violence in the way we raise our children with disrespect. There is violence in the upsurge of C- sections in America. There is violence in the way we judge others, rather than wait for deeper understanding. And we can all feel this violence in our very being, because we are made of water. The water knows how it is being treated.

It was a message of hope. It was a message for me to carry for myself as well. It would lay in wait for a time when this sense would bring a witness to truth. It gave me certainty that non-violence is a vital way to move through this world as human beings. That the only way to be whole, healthy, and filled with light is to consider all of us, connected, heard, in every decision we make to move forward. We are capable of a glorious beauty out of all of this brutality.

Glynis (Glee) Lumb is an artist and a member of Multnomah Meeting, Portland, Oregon. She blogs at <gleebeans-geebeans.blogspot.com>.

Departure

Anne Madora Scherer

*take from the real and familiar
beaten and bruised body, spirit, soul
aching for what once was
and is no more
alone and exposed
to the elements
discarded and disposed of
broken pieces left behind*

Anne Madora Scherer is a writer, poet and artist. She attends Rochester Meeting in Minnesota.



Nightfall: Fear of Being Alone by Anne Madora Scherer

Jesus Loves Me: A Senior Citizen's Version

Mariellen Gilpin

*Jesus loves me, yes I know,
For my life has taught me so.
I've been as low as I can go
I do it o'er and o'er.*

Refrain:

*Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me
Yes, Jesus loves me
He never gives up on me.*

*I'm Ms. One Note when it comes to sin;
Same-old, same-old, again and again
Not a bit of originality.
But Jesus never gives up on me.*

*Like Pavlov, ego rings her bell;
There I am in my own hell.
Hell at first seems pretty sweet,
Then cause and effect catch up with me.*

*But when I cry out in despair and pain,
Jesus tells me I can always change.
"Everybody makes mistakes," he says,
"Even Mozart had to learn his scales."*

*"I've helped you do it different before,
Each time you try you learn more and more.
I'll help you this time too,
I will never give up on you."*

*All around is dark, save Jesus' light.
I reach down deep and really try.
When I can't hope Jesus hopes for me;
He never gives up on me.*

*As many times as I've crawled out of hell
I've learned to do it pretty well.
"See," Jesus says, "Because I love you
I never will give up on you."*

Mariellen Gilpin is an editor of WCTS and poster child for the Mistakes in Prayer Society. She is a member of Urbana-Champaign Meeting, Illinois.

and became much more aware of the struggle parents experience trying to secure mental health resources for their children.

For someone so worried about what she was to say, I really believe I was sent there to receive all that was shared as well.

At the end of the panel, I spoke to the organizer briefly and to a few panelists and headed home pondering whether I'd made any impact at all. As I entered the house—kissing my husband, scooping up my baby, dropping my bag and easing my shoes off—I began to exhale a bit. Not fifteen minutes later, however, I began receiving texts on my phone from friends saying they'd seen me on the evening news.

The next morning I got an email from a member of the local CASA board, on which I serve, saying she saw me in the Friday paper on the PTA panel.

Subsequently that weekend, I participated in a rousing, energizing discussion on community radio; hosted a great ICHV book club launch where we had a profound discussion about how to quell the violence within us; and I continued to receive invites to speak to other groups over that weekend.

On Sunday evening of that weekend, a neighbor brought copies of the Friday newspapers with pictures of me in the paper. She said, "I always thought that you all were really cool neighbors. And I knew you were a mom—and that's plenty. But I had no idea of who else you are—and all that you do. Thank you for doing all you do."

As you might imagine, such waves of recognition should have worked to aid me in finding meaning from despair. But all of this reminded me of another mother standing in the gap that a girlfriend of mine, Pastor Angela Shannon, Interim Pastor of Calvary Lutheran Church (Angola, Indiana) brought to my attention:

Aiah's daughter Rizpah took the rough cloth that was worn to show sadness

*"The safest place
In the whole wide world
Is in the will of God...
...It may be on a mountain peak
Or in a valley low.
But wherever, wherever
It may be
If God says go,
GOOOOOOOOOOOOO."*

*—The Will of God by Karen Clark-sheard
of the Clark Sisters*

and put it on a rock for herself. She stayed there from the beginning of the harvest until the rain fell on her sons' bodies. During the day she did not let the birds of the sky touch her sons' bodies, and during the night she did not let the wild animals touch them. (2 Samuel 21:10 (New Century Version))

Rizpah of 2nd Samuel is that Old Testament mother—whose sons were killed by King David along with five others—who sat guarding the bodies of those dead sons for approximately six months.

Thus, as I conclude this essay, Senate Committee Hearings on Preventing Gun Violence have convened and the powerful have gathered to haggle over how we live out the right to bear arms.

Yet, in the shadows of this, Hadiya Pendleton—a young honor student and athlete from Chicago who participated in President Obama's second inauguration last week—was shot and killed the night before the Senate hearings began.

She, like so many other victims of gun violence, were held up in the debate, but ultimately ignored by our lawmakers. During these proceedings, far too many elected officials threw their own bodies over the Second Amendment—while the lifeless bodies of America's children continue to pile up in the morgues of America.

So, how do I find meaning from despair? I look to my foremother Rizpah's example. Instead of focusing on my fear, I count it a privilege to stand in the gap for too many dead Americans and wounded Americans—to do this work in hope of eradicating gun violence in American life.

Nicole Anderson-Cobb grew up on Chicago's Southeast Side and is an award-winning playwright and founder of Samaritan Road Development Corporation, an umbrella non-profit entity for plays, courses and workshops that seek to promote reflection, dialogue, conflict resolution and personal, group and community transformation <samaritanroadproductions.com>.

Aiah's daughter Rizpah took the rough cloth that was worn to show sadness and put it on a rock for herself. She stayed there from the beginning of the harvest until the rain fell on her sons' bodies. During the day she did not let the birds of the sky touch her sons' bodies, and during the night she did not let the wild animals touch them.

—2 Samuel 21:10 (New Century Version)

Lilith 2013

Robin Arbiter

*There she is
In unsteady flight
From an impending Christ.
She will fall:
She will fall and weep
For her too-small hands
And the imperfect path
Fading behind her.
She will, wounded,
Forget the site of her pain:
If only she could be loved!*

Promise and Pain

Robin Arbiter

*Every woman is Jesus
when she's in love,
suspended on a cross
between promise and pain.*

*Monthly, she is bled
and held aloft,
her body pierced
to make a window
from which she can see
the whole of life,
or, if she chooses,
just the eyes
of those for whom
she climbed so high.*

Robin Arbiter is an artist, writer, and community activist living in Urbana, Illinois. The adopted daughter of Jewish parents who sent her to Christian Science Sunday Schools, she calls on the histories and traditions of many birth-and-choice ancestors in her work. She participates with Anne Scherer and Mariellen Gilpin in a twice-monthly writers' workshop exploring spiritually oriented writing.

All I Own is Fear

Robin Arbiter

*I love you,
and I'm afraid
of loving anything
less than eternal.
This is not how you
intended me to live
in this world you gave us,
this bright, dying world.
Yet of your vast self,
you have shared only
the most brittle parts.
Should I really resign myself
to a song that is always ending?
Breath and heartbeat,
breath and heartbeat.
Everything I am tempted to love
is what you've given
and what you will take away.
Only fear belongs to me.*

Scapegoat

Robin Arbiter

*If by some chance
I survived the fall,
the rocks, cactus needles,
startled snakes, and all,
could I be expected
not to flinch
at your warm hand on my head
and the ribbon at my ear?*

*It is not you but I
who must discover
why a goat in the wilderness,
why your sins upon my back.*

*I kick a stone upon your path-
a stumbling block before the
blind.*

*I cover your deep voice
with my cries
and place this red ribbon
on your scarf of blue and white.
Now you, look into my open eyes,
past my scarred body
that was not good enough for
heaven,
and tell me, what god named
you?*

OhSorrow, Here You Are

Robin Arbiter

*OhSorrow, here you are.
The days were crisp without you
And through the nights rode bloodandmoon.
There is one whose breath I breathed
And for whom I took you off
And draped you in my closet,
Plumshimmer barely visible.
Now I take you trimmedwithsilver
To cover me again.
The days are sluggish, the nightsdecay,
And I in my dullgarnet pain eat flesh in solitude,
Eschewing the leafy greens,
With only youSorrow for comfort.*

Have You Gained Something from Your Loss?

Pradnya Dharmadhikari

Jacob, Will, Treesong, Maria, C.J. and Maurine were on hand.

The question we pulled was so topical: *“Are you aware of having gained something from your loss?”* Though we pull questions randomly, this one came on the heels of our last one, which was “What have you lost?”

Is the Universe trying to teach us something about loss?

Treesong said that “Nature abhors a vacuum,” so you can gain something after a loss.

C.J. offered that the truest virtue is empty because it allows you to be filled.

Maurine moved to the subject of alchemy, which is about transformation (or loss) of one state into another. The resurrection myths are about changing from death to life through a passage of suffering.

Will offered that the creation myths are also about losing and gaining, death and renewal.

Treesong told a story about losing a job and discovering that he was then liberated to find new exciting opportunities as a result.

C.J. told the unfolding story of a man who lost his horse. His neighbors lamented his loss, but he said, “How can you be sure?” Each time a loss was followed by a gain.

Will told the story of the ancient medieval concept of the Wheel of Fortune (not the game show!) and how Don Quixote caught by his lance and whirling on the windmill symbolized the ups and downs of fortune.

Treesong reminded us of the motto: “Never place a period where God has put a comma.”

Question #2: *Do things always happen for a reason?*

We felt that this question can either be trite or deep, depending on the perspective of the questioner.

Treesong answered “Yes and no,” for there is as much reason as we can find in it.

Maria said that sometimes you have to wait for the answer.

Treesong felt that harmonic resonance can bring to us what we are seeking, and likewise we can send out vibrations to others.

C.J. asked if there is Fate or reason behind the universe.

Jacob offered that you construct your reason, but who knows?

Will agreed that we forge our identity from what has happened in the past.

We all felt that we must participate in shaping our own destiny and not simply rely on dumb luck or Fate. We commented, as we often do, that the two questions were related somehow to one another. Perhaps it is the synergy of the group that brings us to a common place of shared wisdom.

Pradnya Dharmadhikari and Maurine Pyle together lead a weekly group at Gaia House, an interfaith foundation on the campus of Southern Illinois University. The name of the group is Questions of Faith and Reality, and is conducted in a contemplative fashion in which participants speak out of silence. Maurine reports that many of the group members later visit the Southern Illinois Quaker Meeting and often become regular attenders. Pradnya records the conversations on her website <raja-yogablog.blogspot.com>.

Falling

Alicia Adams

*Falling away from
illusions of self.
Falling in love
with the Love that I am.*

*Dancing in space
my roots in the Earth
wearing my face
lightly.*

*My circle of lovers
expands with my breath.
Love flows them to me
they enter my heart.*

*In the drama of life
lived to the full
we answer the pull
of heart's welcome tugs
of moments of grace.*

*Grace slows my pace
making room for my shifts
leaving illusions behind.*

*I'm falling away
from illusions of fear
as I hear Life's call
Be Clear!*

Alicia Adams' book, *First Light: Flight from Fear* is described on her website: www.newlightshift.com. It is available through Amazon and her website. Readers of WCTS give her “confidence that she is now in good company.”

Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India—May, 1995

Alicia Adams

We have just completed another two-day session of blood transfusions. The IV line is still embedded in Craig's left arm. We run vital fluids into him day and night, attempting to feed him, to replace the liquid that pours out of him. Dr. Sen switches the IV line from site to site, arm to arm, as necessary. We both dread this necessity. Craig's low platelet count could cause him to bleed uncontrollably from even a small puncture wound. I watch Craig carefully to make sure he doesn't pull out the line when he is having hallucinations.

Hallucinations? What difference is there in what he sees compared with what is happening? Who is the dreamer? Both. Both of us are dreaming and cannot awaken.

Dr. Sen is late tonight. Usually he's here by 10 pm after his clinic. His visits punctuate my day into segments I attempt to endure. When he can, he comes in the morning before he rides his motorcycle to the medical school where he works. This morning he didn't come. Tonight he is late. What's happening? I have no way of knowing. While I work with Craig to reposition his IV line, dread builds in me. I trust Dr. Sen, but should he have an accident and be rendered unconscious, who would take over for him? Who would look in on us? Who would know of our need and his importance to our survival? He has no partner, no one to cover for him.

I have been walking step by step, moment by moment, coping. What is wrong with me now? Why do I find it suddenly impossible to be here alone in this situation? Why do I think I am alone? Why can't I reach to those who sustain me on inner levels? I feel cut-off from my Home, from all that's familiar—comforting, safe. I feel abandoned.

I know we aren't abandoned, but my knowing is a mental exercise attempting to reassure my runaway mind. My mind is running away with visions of what has been, what is, and what is likely to be. It's divided against itself. Part of my mind is focused on the tasks at hand; part is whirling off in nightmares of imagined futures. Part is still, watching. Gradually my identification shifts to the Watcher. Subtly, energy is withdrawn from my fear-driven, exhaustion-driven, mind-driven self. Finally my movements have accomplished what's necessary. I still my body and allow the Watcher to still my frantic mind.

I glimpse a truth: I am not in control here. I never have been. It's an illusion to think otherwise. Black vortex becomes black peace. No Light. No movement. In my exhaustion of my efforts to do, to understand, I release it all. I understand. I am at peace.

Dr. Sen comes at midnight. His mother has been ill, he tells me. He apologizes for being so late. I smile and reassure him he is welcome any time. I am calm. I accept this situation, though I know I am near my limit in coping with it. After he leaves, I lie beside Craig with my hand lightly touching his arm with its attached IV. We sleep deeply. I dream.

I am in deep water, emerald green. I swim down—down below the sunlit surface into the depths. I swim to Craig, who is slowly sinking. He's unconscious, pale. Passive. Holding him in my arms, I kick powerfully to slow his descent. We are both sinking, spiraling slowly into dark waters. Above I see light. Far above. I kick steadily with all my strength. Our descent slows and stops. I must kick strongly, constantly, to keep us from sinking. With all my effort, I can't swim us to the surface.

Love's Breath

Alicia Adams

*I sought to hold you close to me
to breathe you with my breath.
I sought to hold you safe with me
and safe our love to last.*

*Whence comes this strength of love in me?
Whence comes this love of you?
If I've not made it such myself
then Love Itself flows through.*

*It's safe I'm leaving you, my love
in that Love's breath
in you.*

Alicia Adams' book, *First Light: Flight from Fear* is described on her website <newlightshift.com>. It is available through Amazon and her website. Readers of WCTS give her the confidence that she is now in good company.

Craig's face and form are peaceful, as though he's already dead. Life is still in him, I know, but it's near to being extinguished. He can make no effort to help himself and all my effort is not enough to save him. I am near the point of no return. I may still be able to reach the surface if I let go of my hold on him. If I let him go. I can't let him go down alone. I can't swim upward anymore. All I have to give is given. It is no longer my effort which will save him. Spiraling, entwined, we sink into green-black, blue-black depths.

Suddenly a white rope appears beside us. I know: our friends have tossed us this lifeline! It may be too late to save us, but I wrap the line around both of us and knot it securely. I tug it to signal to them to pull us up. Strongly we are pulled through the water. My lungs are bursting. I can't hold on longer. Our heads surface. I gulp air. Ready hands lift us over the edge of the lifeboat. I know: Craig will live. Our friends intervened in time.

When I awake, it is mid-morning. Craig is awake and conscious. He's still sweating, but he's not delirious.

"I had a dream, Craig," I tell him softly, "a wonderful dream." Lying beside him, I tell him my dream. He takes it in.

"Is it a sign?" he whispers.

"I'm sure it is," I reply.

"They'd better help us pretty soon," he says softly after a long pause. I say nothing. We lie quietly, testing the day: testing our ability to cope with this day.

Alicia Adams is a frequent contributor to WCTS. This excerpt is from Called Home by Grace, which is Volume II of the trilogy, Net-Caught: Our Journey to Wholeness.

Legion's Healing

Cathie Waisvisz

*Black corroded shards of death
rip my heart, infect my soul
Tormented I tear off my clothes
my chains
everything my chains
Receiving abandonment
I seek shelter with the dead
my eyes and skin feasting on their rest
the cool tombstones as balm
welcome oasis to my senses
Still my last chance dark horse
plunges on
to crash and burn with me on it*

*I tell you this with only screams
You seem to already know
Naked and raw and unwittingly
I communicate without words
You are not afraid of catching madness
You do not run in fear as others do
Somehow your presence calms me
I want to linger here
Cool catacombs are waiting
shying horse with blinders on
confusion wakes a choice to make
escape or test this balm*

*You reach out and touch me
a spark in my body slowly spreads
infused with heat I fear torture
your presence commands I remain
I boil, then simmer, then cool
relief sweeps over my brow
The catacombs can wait
I am not abandoned now
I notice I have clothes on
how or when was lost in the haze
buzzing crowds' clothes keep them warm
my warmth comes from your love*

Cathie Waisvisz did not "take" well to formal education and was more concerned about what was going on out the window or had her nose in a novel, and with self-education came freedom and exploration of world history, psychology and the arts. Her employment has included work at the University of Illinois Foundation but since her marriage two years ago she has taken advantage of writing workshops and singing with the Parkland Chorus, and came to the Quaker Friends' Meeting in Urbana after her former Lutheran church disbanded; she likes the Quakers also because she is free.

Never Attempt to Fill the Hole

When we love fully and endure loss, an empty spot opens in us because the part of us that loved so hard dies with the loved one. It has never filled inside me. My advice to you is to never attempt to fill it inside yourself either. Some of the greatest wisdom that has ever developed inside me comes from that empty spot that Nick used to occupy. It's where he lives in me, where occasionally he whispers some perspective or delight or sorrow in my ear and I hear his voice. That's a nice thing that I cherish. I wish it for you.

Jan Seeley shared this email from a friend after the death of her husband Joe Seeley. The Seeley family worships with Urbana-Champaign Meeting, Illinois.

Mothering Seed

Cathie Waisvicz

*Glasses obscuring vision
abandoned
though blurry I could see clearly
Not crying,
the absolute mothering link
freed me*

*Leaves falling in springtime
model chains to nowhere shed
Dancing with infant garden words
truth encircles true,
ripples from the seeds firmly planted
in the fountain of all that is,
and all that is to be*

*Glasses obscuring vision
obtained,
and the world takes hostage only my remains
Model chains link true to false again
I see clearly what was lost,
how we were meant to be
I'm crying*

Love's Farthest Reaches

Cathie Waisvicz

*With no screams left inside me
the jaws of death held me, gently,
pulling me into the merciful depths
of Love's farthest reaches;
Tomb shut and heaven-bound,
I lay on Love's living floor*

*My tomb weightless and
rising from the depths,
pressure changes cracking my
bones had no effect*

*Gaining Love's upper reaches
I hearken to the Siren's sound,
long anticipated, surrounding all;
and my heart leaps with boundless joy*

*Rising past the Siren's sound-gate
I broke through the surface,
my farthest reaches knowing Love's farthest reaches,
and knowing resurrected life anew*

*The earth blanketed in peace,
celebratory sirens sang the good news:
The lions lie with the lambs,
mouse asleep in the lion's paw;
And I, unafraid, had work to do
with no screams left inside me.*

Rebegot of Darkness

Lois Pomeroy.

3 Children

Cathie Waisvicz

Youth's promise,
treasure buried as bones
beneath the bracken of their
mothers' years

A passing stranger, (a)
vagrant sojourner of love,
unearths the radiant stores

Imprints trampled,
or set?

Get Out of Town

Cathie Waisvicz

Storms
blowing God-forsaken
sight's pain,
Soaring
(Happy clean warm dry)

Revolution
timeless-weary, Change
for change
Pleading
(Happy clean warm dry)

Hunger
lingering hope
try again
when
Sight's light, rejoicing

The following is a review of Chapter 3 of *A Leg to Stand On* by Oliver Sacks (Simon and Schuster, 1984).

Those who wrestle with despair might be helped by this short chapter in a gripping true story of one man's journey from health to despair and back to health. Fortunately few of us find ourselves in the blackness of despair. And those who do can seldom write of it. But equally fortunately, one man, Oliver Sacks, did experience it and was able to write about it. I knew his work as a scientist, a doctor, a musicologist, a gifted writer. But I never guessed him to be a religious man, let alone a mystic. Perhaps he wasn't such a one until he suffered a grievous accident. Hiking alone up a remote mountain in Norway, he was confronted by an enormous wild bull. Fleeing down the mountain in panic, he fell, breaking his leg and severing its nerves.

Even though he came near to death in that cold, forlorn place, he did not experience despair. That came later, during his recovery, when he had a total breakdown of his sense of self. His body felt alien and inhuman to him. He wrote, "All the cognitive and intellectual and imaginative powers which had previously aided me in exploring different neuropsychological lands were wholly useless, meaningless, in the limbo of Nowhere. I had fallen off the map of the world, of the knowable. I had fallen out of space, out of time too. Nothing could happen, ever, any more. Intelligence,

reason, sense, meant nothing. Memory, imagination, hope, meant nothing. I had lost everything which afforded a foothold before. I had entered, willy-nilly, a dark night of the soul."

Over and over he tried to find words to describe the desperation of his condition. In seeking hope and a way out, Sacks discovered that science and reason were of no use to him. He turned instead to literature: St. John of the Cross, T.S. Eliot, the Metaphysical poets. Sacks, struggling up from despair, found himself echoing the words of John Donne, "I am, I will be, rebegot."

He ends the chapter by saying: "But finally...there remained only the Scriptures, the impossible faith:

"Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up from the depths of the earth (*Psalms 71:20*).

"Secretly, half-skeptically, hesitantly, yearningly, I addressed myself to this unimaginable 'Thou'."

Sacks learned patience. Most of a year passed, but finally he did regain his place in the world of the well.

Lois Pomeroy is a member of New Paltz meeting of New York Yearly Meeting. She has come to value more and more the gathered silence in our weekly worship. She writes in her journal every morning, and then heads off to the gym. "Some mornings I can't tell which practice is more spiritual."

Sharing our Stories

The First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics

A retreat organized by the editors of *What Canst Thou Say?*

June 14 – 16, 2013, Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana

This retreat is the result of a rare face-to-face meeting of the editors of WCTS (Mike Resman, Judy Lumb and Mariellen Gilpin). During our worshipful time together, it was proposed that we host a gathering of Friendly mystics with the intention of making it an annual event.

The weekend gathering will provide ample opportunities to socialize, worship together, share about our journeys and attend interest groups.

Our sense of purpose for the retreat is reflected in the following queries:

- Have you experienced a felt sense of God's presence and power?
- Have you been filled with a sense of love for all people, or a sense of oneness with all creation?
- Have you received God's Guidance in answer to one of Life's knottier dilemmas?
- Has your life been profoundly changed by such experiences?
- Do you long to know others in that which is Eternal?
- Are you spiritually fed by sharing stories with others whose lives have been changed by God's presence?

Accommodations: Earlham College has welcomed us and is providing air conditioned dorm rooms and vegetarian meals.

The Registration Form is available for download on our website <whatcanstthousay.org/MysticsRegistration.doc>. Return the form with your deposit to Michael Resman, 815 9th St SW, Rochester MN 55902 <resmanmh@aol.com>. **Deadline May 15, 2013.**

Scholarships are available, and support for them is encouraged. Stipends are available for those willing to facilitate small groups.

Allergies and Limitations: Please indicate any food allergies or mobility limitations on the registration form where indicated. Also indicate any special scheduling issues of arrival and departure. Participants are asked to use only fragrance free personal products.

Cancellations: Because of college requirements, the deposit is non-refundable after May 15, 2013.

Mystics' Open Mic: On Saturday evening, participants are invited to bring something to share—a poem, story, song, or interpretive dance for example. We suggest the following queries for you to consider as you prepare: Has a spiritual experience transformed your life? What have been your reflections on that experience? How does your spiritual life enter into your interpersonal relationships?

Contact: Michael Resman with questions or to get on the mailing list for the registration form: resmanmh@aol.com, 507-281-5838, 815 9th Street SW, Rochester MN 55902.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Please send this form to: WCTS c/o Richard Himmer,
1035 Hereford Drive, Blue Bell PA 19422-1925

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August 2013

Literature as Revelation

Guest Editor: **Bill Mueller with Judy Lumb**

Has the Bible, or any other kind of literature, ever brought you face-to-face with the human condition, the Great Spirit (Living God), an ineffable sense of beauty, or a sense of union with everything in creation? How was this revelation different from other kinds? Did this experience change your life? Was the change temporary, permanent, or both? What spiritual literature most speaks to your condition, and why? Share your stories, and the passages that changed you, with our readers.

Deadline: May 15, 2013

November 2013

Trials and Temptations

Editor: **Michael Resman**

For my sighing comes like my bread, and my groanings are poured out like water (Job 3:24).

Despite some discomfort, difficult times can be powerful vehicles propelling us along our spiritual path. Have you known trials that changed your relationship with God? What lessons have temptations taught; and did you learn because you resisted, or because you gave in? Can you offer a guiding hand to others who may be struggling?

Deadline: August 15, 2013

February 2014

Spirit-Led Writing

Editor: **Carol Roth with Judy Lumb**

“Thus saith the Lord ...” What is your experience with spirit-led writing? Have you felt the hand of God in your writing? Have you ever received what you thought was channeled material? How did you feel while it was happening? How did you discern whether it was ego or truth? Did you keep it to yourself, or share it with others? How did you feel about sharing it? In what setting did you share it, and what was the response? What do you think now?

Deadline: November 15, 2013

What Canst Thou Say?

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**Meaning
from Despair**