

What canst thou say?

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

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CALLED TO INTERCESSORY PRAYER

HOLDING PROBLEM PEOPLE IN THE LIGHT

by Lauren Leach

I am not the person I would have envisioned writing about intercessory prayer. I confess that I used to view the topic of praying for others with the reluctance of a child facing a visit to her least-liked great aunt, the one with the bad breath. Yes, I knew it was the proper thing to do to put the needs of others ahead of my own. But I was needy, and I was hurting, and the pain wasn't getting better, and who was praying for me? I was the child who, having endured the visit with the great aunt, demanded of God the Parent, "I've been good – where's my cookie?"

I fell (or was pushed) into the practice of intercessory prayer by the least altruistic of motives. A move halfway across the country had brought me to a small town that seemed provincial, intolerant, and dangerously inbred. My students had trouble accepting my East Coast accent and audacious demeanor, and wrote rude comments on my course evaluation forms.

From the Editor

The theme for this issue of *What Canst Thou Say?* is **Called to Intercessory Prayer**. Our prayer life is a matter of experimentation, of making mistakes and trying to learn from them. It is, indeed, a voyage of discovery – about ourselves, our loved one, about prayer, about God. The stories in this issue are a reminder that God takes us as we are; God teaches each of us the lessons that are especially ours to learn. The wonder is, when we share our experiences the whole world resonates in tune. We are not alone.

As Dorothy Neumann reminds us, the words we use in prayer are not important. The form prayer takes varies as much as personal style does. What is important is that we pray and keep on praying, and try to listen to our Teacher. Our thanks go to the writers in this issue, who have shared their experiences so generously with us.

Mariellen O. Gilpin, Editor for this issue

friend had grown confined by the two-and-a-half hour commute between us.

Just when I had thought my quality of life had gotten intolerable, a senior colleague at school had begun oblique personal attacks in faculty meetings, culminating in a verbal dressing-down after one meeting for being "too involved" in research. All my problems, it seemed to me, could be solved by a career change, facilitated by a miraculous job vacancy in the town where my significant other lived. I prayed for this way to open. It did not open.

At this point, angry at God for not listening to me, I called my good friend and spiritual advisor and wailed, "What am I doing wrong? Why isn't God listening to me? What should I be praying for?" His response was that I should hold my problems, and the people who were causing me problems, in the Light.

Instantly, the rebellious child within me came raging out in full temper tantrum. "Why should I be praying for them? I'm the one who needs help! If I could just get a job in Lawrence, it would solve all my problems! Don't I deserve to have a better job? A good relationship? A life some place that doesn't have a history of lynching blacks and doesn't drive people out of town just because they're different!"

Again, my friend suggested that I pray for all the people and situations that were bothering me, because helping them would at least reduce the pain and frustration they were causing me. And I, reluctant but obedient child, began to do so.

My first target of prayer was the colleague who was bullying me. As I held her in the Light every morning, I noticed a gradual change in my perception. I began to see my colleague as a hurt, damaged child who had never gotten enough affirmation from her family of origin and who had turned to the college and community to replace the void inside her. As the focus at the college changed toward faculty research and distance education, she felt bitter that the rules for survival in her new "family" had changed. A new faculty member who received recognition for research and innovation would surely seem like a threat. Indeed, she

My developing romantic relationship with an old college

was who I could have been, would have been, were it not for my years in therapy. I developed a sense of compassion for her.

At the same time, I gained an awareness that she would never be given the impetus to get healthier if I did not challenge her behavior toward me. One day, moved by something (the Light?) I began to use active listening techniques in response to her pot shots, asking her to clarify the messages she was presenting. Although she could neither state what she really meant, nor take responsibility for the damaging statements, she never bullied me again.

Gradually I began including other targets, such as the spiritual health of the university and the wider community, in my prayers. Change in a person is easy to spot, but what about change in a community? I will note that, since I have begun praying for the university and community, several things have happened: Faculty hirings are slowly becoming somewhat more diverse. The gay and lesbian student group on campus presented a drag queen show to raise funds for the local Children's Center, which met with amazing success. A colleague of mine recently noted, with some amazement, that she had seen four multiracial couples on campus that week. I feel safer now living in a place where differences are slowly becoming more acceptable. I don't know that my prayer created any of these new developments, but it certainly couldn't have hurt.

Lauren Leach is a member of Urbana-Champaign Meeting, IL, currently living in rural Missouri. She writes, "By the way, my student evaluation ratings have gone up, and my boyfriend and I have located a town to live in halfway between our respective places of employment."

A DECISION MADE FROM DEEP WITHIN

by Demaris Wehr

Effective intercessory prayer is characterized by the deepest level of desire, truthfulness and intent one can muster. In my own case, it has sometimes been a prayer prayed in agony and anguish; at other times, prayer has been accompanied by an extraordinary peace. But in all cases, when it has "worked," it has been characterized by a decision made from deep within, and never from a neutral, indifferent, repetitious or bored place.

Probably my first intercessory prayer, ever, was one made on my own behalf. It was a time of great mental, emotional and spiritual suffering. I was young and desperately unhappy, feeling trapped in my first marriage. My parents had undergone an unbelievably confusing and traumatic divorce a few years earlier. This had no doubt catapulted me into my marriage as a remedy for the pain caused by the divorce.

My husband and I had recently become parents of a dear little girl who was sick a lot. My husband had a clear sense of his identity and calling. He had recently

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become a junior faculty member at Haverford College, while I was a "mere housewife." He worked constantly, it seemed, while my talents lay fallow as I took care of Kirsten (or so it felt to me at the time). My self-esteem was at an all-time low. The women's movement hadn't yet made its appearance. I was suffering from battle fatigue (the ongoing, unresolved trauma of my parents' very difficult divorce) and from the unnamable syndrome from which many educated young mothers suffered in the '60's. I remember walking across the sun-filled Haverford campus one afternoon in desperation. My first intercessory prayer was: "Dear God, if you exist, help me."

To my amazement, this prayer worked. Over time, though not immediately, things began showing up in my life that had not been there before. That simple prayer had the elements of what I have come to identify in effective prayer. It was heartfelt. It was honest. There was a deep intent to get better, to get out of the mess I was in, though I had absolutely no idea how. I have prayed many prayers since, but many of them are forgotten. That one is remembered.

A few years later found me divorced, living alone in Ann Arbor with my then four-year-old daughter. The next incident of prayer changed my life. It happened this way. My daughter was prone to convulsions, which terrified me. She had spent a week in Children's Hospital in Philadelphia undergoing a battery of tests. The test results were inconclusive, leaving me with no recourse but Phenobarbital, baby aspirin and cool baths in the middle of the night if she had a fever. She had fevers frequently. The doctors had said she could suffer some brain damage if she had any more convulsions.

One night, Kirsten got a high fever and showed all the signs of an approaching convulsion. A good friend

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encouraged me to call a Christian Science practitioner for prayer help. We had experienced some minor healings

by prayer before this time, so the idea didn't seem totally foreign to me. I called the practitioner, who *assured* me that Kirsten was fine and in God's care. This seemed weird to me. How could she be fine? But this man was *so certain*, and spoke from such a depth of conviction. After hanging up, rather than running for the phenobarbital, as had been my habit, I sat down and prayed. I also read a portion of Mrs. Eddy's book, *Science and Health*. (¹Please note that this is not a plug for Christian Science. The power behind this healing is the property of no denomination. It has to be accessible to all or it couldn't be accessible to any.)

I went downstairs to check on Kirsten. Nothing had changed. Her breathing was rapid and shallow; her skin was hot to the touch. Normally my heart would have started racing and I would have literally run for the medicine and started running the bath. I would have waked up my sleepy daughter, plunged her, protesting, into the cool water, tried to distract her with toys while she railed about, wanting out of the water. This time, however, my state of mind was entirely different. It was not exactly an "altered state of consciousness," although it was certainly not my habitual state of consciousness in that situation.

What happened next was a deep moment of reckoning. I stood next to Kirsten's bed listening to her breathe. The practitioner had said she was fine. As I stood there, I asked myself: "Do I believe in God or not?" I made myself vote. I waited, in silence, for the deepest truth of me to emerge. Finally, I answered yes to my question. Something sank deeper in me.

Then I asked myself: "Do I trust the practitioner or not?" Again, I stood there and made myself be absolutely honest. No fudging here. From the depths of my being arose an affirmation. "Yes, he seems honest; as people go, remarkably honest." Something sank even deeper.

Next, I stood there and addressed God – the God I hadn't even known existed in my prayer of two years earlier, and about whom I had only become sure in the preceding five minutes. "God," I said, "I'm terrified, but I leave her with you." And I turned around and walked out of her bedroom. I fell into a peaceful sleep in my own bed.

Imagine my amazement as, the next morning, four-year-old, golden-haired Kirsten came bounding up the stairs fully healed. I felt as though I stood on sacred ground, totally new terrain. My daughter was healed (and by the way, she never had another convulsion; never even came close). Even more importantly, my worldview had shifted to one which now included a good, loving God with actual capability of healing disease. For the first time in years, I felt safe. And joy-filled. My daughter was safe. This conviction of fundamental, existential safety undergirded my prayers

from that time on. And my prayers became increasingly effective as a result, I think, of my deepened faith.

Dear friends, I do not know how to conclude this article. There is a tension to hold, it seems to me, between experiences like mine above and those painful ones where prayer seems to go unanswered. I do know that when I've really gotten "down there," as I tried to describe, healings happened. However, there have been times when I couldn't get there; when I've tried and tried and tried to the point of obsession with no luck. How does one find a graceful combination of surrender and hope? How does one find the ability to live with what is, if that is ongoing suffering? I do not know the answers to these questions. I only know that help has come my way as a result of deep prayer, and that now, prayer itself, regardless of "results" is, for me, a sustaining activity.

Demaris Wehr is a Jungian psychotherapist in private practice who is trying to figure out what to call herself, since her practice has a spiritual intent. She teaches a course in Jungian psychology and one in nonviolence at Andover Newton Theological School. She was raised Quaker and has spent much of her life in Quakerdom. She is going to Bosnia this summer with the Karuna Center for Multicultural Transformation and Peacebuilding.

THE NOT-PRAYED PRAYER

by Carolyn Wilbur Treadway

As a child and youth, my life was very much affected by illness. Especially in cold weather, I was sick more than I was well. I got one upper respiratory infection after another, and each one developed into a long siege of asthma when for days and nights without end I would labor for breath. Even now, five decades later, my chest and back muscles ache just remembering my struggle to breathe. Just as soon as I recovered from one bout of asthma, I would get sick again. My many allergies may have triggered this endless cycle.

Understandably, my constant illnesses were difficult for my family and peers to deal with. I was different, and could not do the usual physical things. The adults protected me; my peers teased and sometimes ridiculed me. I grew up thinking of myself as frail and somehow defective, if not "handicapped." (Something was wrong with *me*.) Fortunately I "outgrew" my asthma when I went off to college. I was amazed to discover I could participate in vigorous physical activity with no ill effects. It wasn't until I trained in family therapy years later that I learned asthma is a classic family system psychosomatic disease! (Something was wrong with the *system*.)

I had been born prematurely, exactly seven months gestation, birth weight three pounds fourteen ounces. One of our children was also born prematurely, exactly seven months gestation, birth weight three pounds fourteen ounces. Caring for our tiny, so delicate infant, I

pumped breast milk to feed our preemie to decrease her risk of developing allergies, and then I nursed her until she was age two. Nonetheless, she too developed recurring upper respiratory infections. At age one, she developed asthma for the first time and was hospitalized.

I held and nursed her inside her oxygen tent and watched *her* labored breath. Profound feelings about our daughter's illness, then mine, then hers, then mine jumped out at me. I did *not* want her life to be influenced by asthma as mine had been! With enormous conviction, and from the very deepest parts of my whole being, I vowed, absolutely vowed that this intergenerational transmission of systemic illness would *stop*, right here, right *now*! Our daughter was *not* going to be asthmatic, no way! Never will I forget nursing our baby in that oxygen tent and making that fervent vow. It was a powerful moment in which intention transcended rational knowing.

The next day, our baby was discharged from the hospital, accompanied by a large bottle of marax, a bronchodilator. Her pediatrician said: "She'll need a lot of this." Under my breath I instantly replied: "Oh no, she won't." Our daughter never had asthma again. Not even a trace of it. Influenced by shadows of my own past, it took me quite a while to believe this would continue to be true. I did not discard that bottle of marax until she was twelve!

Amazingly it had *never* occurred to me that what happened in the oxygen tent had anything to do with Spirit That it *was* prayer! And that my not-prayed prayer *was* answered!

Demaris Wehr's story, which I first heard in 1994, helped me change my perceptions, and to reframe many of my life experiences. Perhaps most remarkably, I learned that intercessory prayer can occur even when prayer is *not* prayed! On that day so long ago, I had a deep concern and a fervent wish for the health of our daughter. I did *not* seek Divine assistance or intervention; frankly I did not even think of things then in those terms. But I did have intention and I did make a vow from the depths of my being. And our daughter was healed.

Decades later, it dawned on me that the intention/vow and the healing just might have been connected. All too slowly, I awakened to the Presence of the Spirit, which may be far beyond all awareness or knowing of the person. Finally, I learned that when a person cries out from the depths of her being, and commits with her whole heart, this *is* prayer. And that with or without awareness, overtly prayed or not, prayer *can be* answered!

Carolyn Wilbur Treadway's meeting is Heartland Friends Worship Group, Normal, IL. A lifelong Quaker, her spiritual practices include prayer which is sometimes danced, and frequent trips into nature with her camera and an open heart.

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I OR THOU?

by Dorothy Neumann

There is a great danger in evaluating our prayers. Whether we are very satisfied or very discouraged with our prayers, the emphasis is on *I* rather than *Thou*. For example, *I* have found a great method for efficacious prayer, or *I* can never pray well. Both are the opposite of the goal of prayer – to leave self behind to make room for God. Why does God listen, answer and love our prayers? It is the Mystery of Divine Love – unanswerable, but wonderful. How to pray thus becomes how to diminish self-importance so one can give greater attention to God.

Dorothy Neumann is a member of Urbana-Champaign Meeting, IL. She teaches English as a Second Language to adults, many of them refugees. She says the whole day goes better when she prays in the morning.

LETTING GO

by Rosemary Ann Blanchard

When my eighteen year-old sister's boyfriend was dying of lymphoma, I tried to pray in the old way of childhood, "Dear God, please don't let David die!" But David *was* dying. Fast. I tried to sit with God in the new-found quiet Quaker way without praying for David. That was impossible. Wherever God and I sat, there were my sister and David and his parents and my own grief for the pain of it all.

So I talked to God about it. I told God I knew that David was dying of the same natural forces that support life. I did not, I explained, have the right to ask that the laws of nature be suspended for our family when the rest of existence was subject to those laws. Then I bargained a little. If there was a way for David to live and if our love for him and prayers for him could in any way help to put him on that path, might God take our love and prayers for that purpose. If not, I gave David in love to God and asked for the strength in all of us that David might not fear and that we might bear the pain.

Whew! What a complicated intercessory prayer! Not at all as simple and straightforward as the prayers I had been taught as a child. But, it helped. I cannot explain it but I experienced the presence of God in our grief and in the hardship of David's last days. I had done my best to avoid magical thinking and incantation. But I had huddled in the Center of All Being with these that I loved and with the tragedy that was overtaking them. I take no credit for the profound and sacred acceptance with which David let go of life, or the sad solace in which my sister was comforted by God in her loss. After all, there had been many prayers from many faith traditions gathered around our little group. I only know that I experienced my prayers as right and real.

Rosemary Ann Blanchard is a Quaker by conviction and a Catholic by tradition. She is highly influenced by Buddhist practice but, following the advice of Thich Nhat Hahn, practices within her own tradition. She is a member of Albuquerque Monthly Meeting and a lifelong student.

REASSURED IN A COMPLETELY NEW WAY by Barry Zalph

As a young adult, I had many misgivings about prayer and little encouragement to try it. Then, in 1983, the brain cancer of my then-wife's mother gave me the impetus to pray. I settled alone in silence and, without a plan, pictured my mother-in-law's head surrounded by light. In a little while particular spots, which I envisioned as the tumors, appeared deep red. I focused on the red spots and "pushed" them gradually through the spectrum to blue, and then to white. I felt healing energy flowing, clearly from the Divine Source. At the end of this unexpectedly visual prayer, I felt reassured in a completely new way.

A few days later, we received word that the tumors had inexplicably shrunk. The news did not surprise me. I became aware, though, that my mother-in-law and her immediate family were waiting for her death. I did not have the strength or sureness to pray, alone, for her miraculous recovery. The remainder of my prayers focused on her comfort rather than her healing. She died a couple of weeks later. This experience made the power of prayer undeniably real to me.

The last several years have brought a gradual easing of my reluctance to pray. Today, I pray that all of us who gather for meeting for worship encounter the Holy Spirit there. In so doing, I begin my own expectant waiting. I pray for everyone who offers or receives vocal ministry. This opens me to messages that I might have dismissed.

During a visit to a friend, I worshipped at the small meeting that he had stopped attending because "nobody ever speaks during worship." Throughout the hour of worship, I prayed that the Spirit would manifest itself to us. I struggled with my own desire to bring forth a message, but became clear that I was to stay silently focused in prayer. During that hour, three Friends gave voice to the Spirit's stirrings in them. Afterwards, my friend commented, "It was like a miracle that three people spoke." He said "miracle" offhandedly, but I experienced it literally.

Invited to help a meeting through a painful situation, I participated in a very intense threshing session. As I intently held that meeting in the Light, a prayer overtook me: "Oh, that I could pray so fervently for my own meeting!" Upon returning home, I sought to hold my meeting in prayer during worship, during business, and throughout the week. This has deepened my appreciation for the vocal ministry shared during

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worship, and reduced my tendency to judge messages and their speakers.

Meetings for business especially bring out my spiritual weaknesses; here, prayer (when I practice it) has made the greatest difference. Another member of my meeting has joined me in this discipline. In a recent meeting for business, I began to feel agitated as an unscheduled item of business appeared ready to derail the agenda into a long and inconclusive discussion. Seeing my friend across the room silently praying, I followed his example. The meeting respectfully referred the concern to the appropriate committee and moved on to the next agenda item.

The more I pray, the more willing I am to pray for miracles. Seeing some of these miracles occur has led me to pray all the more shamelessly! Repeated experiences of God's gracious help in the here and now continue to transform my life.

Since 1991, Barry Zalph has been an active member of Louisville (KY) Friends Meeting. Barry serves as part-time field secretary for Illinois Yearly Meeting. Participation in a Friendly Bible Study group and spiritual friendships with many Friends enrich his spiritual life, as do long-distance bicycling and vegetarian cooking.

ASKING JESUS TO DO THE PRAYING by Mariellen O. Gilpin



A few years ago I wanted to hold a friend and his estranged partner in prayer while they talked together one last time before separating. The interview was to take place at 8:30 in the evening, and I volunteered to hold both of them in prayer as long as it seemed I was needed. I prayed, "Jesus, I don't know how or what to

One must be very careful when praying for others to pray for the removal of the cause and not the removal of the symptom. A simple healing prayer is this: "Bring this life into harmony with God's Will. May you so live that all who meet you will be uplifted, that all who bless you will be blessed, that all who serve you will receive the greatest satisfaction. If any should attempt to harm you, may they contact your thought of God and be healed."

Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words.

pray for them. I don't know if I should pray for a continuation of the relationship, or if it's best for them to separate. Please, *YOU* tell me what to pray for." Then I tried to visualize a Light shining on their faces while I repeated the name of Jesus. I returned to the vision of a Light on their faces whenever my attention wandered.

Suddenly I found myself praying, "Help them listen each other into wholeness." I prayed with all my heart

for a few minutes, and then in my mind's eye I could see them listening to one another intently and openly. I prayed a few more minutes, and then simply knew my efforts were no longer needed. I stopped praying about 9:15, content. And indeed, when I saw my friend a few days later (you can bet I really was eager to hear) he told me that they did hear each other's concerns in the relationship and separate with considerable affection and respect. They had, indeed, listened one another into increased wholeness. And the phrase, *listening into wholeness*, has repeated itself since in my prayers for others.

Mariellen O. Gilpin is a member of Urbana-Champaign Meeting, IL. She celebrates the many ways God has helped her deal with mental illness.

DON QUIXOTE AND THE LAYING ON OF HANDS by Linda Lee

It is four o'clock on Thursday – my time to practice Reiki with Ellen, who has cancer. She stops working. We hug and talk a little. I wash my hands and when I come back she is lying with her head at the foot of her bed, face up, eyes closed. She has chosen the cello music we both enjoy. Even lying down, her expansive energy is evident. She is ready to receive and I see her familiar gentle smile.

I sit on a chair, then place my hands on the top of her head. I center into a meditative state. She takes a long breath, sighs. After a while I move my hands to the sides of her head, cover her ears. I am following the ancient Reiki hand positions. I pray, sometimes briefly aloud and always in my mind. "Dear Jesus, let my hands be your hands. Send your healing power to Ellen. Dear God, hold Ellen in your love, be with us now and always."

But words are not enough. I feel the infinite love that is the essence of all existence. I invite that love into full consciousness and presence. If we remove all that blocks divine love, we enter the place of complete healing.

I move my chair to the side and see the fading sun gleam through the wings of an angel at the window. There is snow; the yellow room is bright. High on a shelf is a statue of Don Quixote, looking toward his dream. I still allow myself the dream of a miracle. My hands are on Ellen's chest and I feel a tingling, buzzing as they get warm, then hot. Almost always I feel a buzzing sensation in my hands, even when there is no unusual amount of heat. Ellen doesn't feel the buzzing, but other energy workers have told me they experience the same thing, so I believe that sensation to be part of the work.

Usually the heat floods in two times during the hour. Sometimes just at the spot Ellen will tell me has been hurting, other times at a place that does not seem to us to be significant. Usually my hands are warm during

most of the session, even though the room may be cool. Usually my whole body heats up and I am sweating when the heat comes through. This never happens to me at other times. I am baffled by the whole process. Ellen and I engage in an act of faith; we open ourselves as much as we are able to the divine mystery.

For a while Ellen's right leg twitched intensely, to the point of discomfort. I had experienced this myself during meditation and learned that it is a release that often happens to people practicing yoga and other meditative disciplines. So I was not concerned about it until Ellen began to be uncomfortable. Her right leg twitched for four weeks in a row.

Once we experimented – Ellen's idea. The leg was twitching. I took my hands off. The twitching stopped. I put my hands back. Twitching again. But that was the last week that leg twitched. After a couple of weeks the left leg began doing the same thing but this time the pain was impossible. I consulted with a Quaker healer, John Calvi, whose workshop I had just attended. "Love her like a gentle aunt, not like a passionate lover," he said. So I prayed, "Please send only the amount of energy that is right for her." It was true that I had been holding the attitude of, "Send all the healing you've got, full steam, top speed, flat out, no holds barred." And of course one ought, first of all, to respect where a person is and what is right for them. When I changed my intention, the twitching stopped.

I occasionally use the techniques of Therapeutic Touch used by some nurses. But I don't think technique is necessary. Love is the medicine I invite. Awareness is what I attempt. Healing is my intention and prayer.

Herceptin, a medication, brought a miracle and love has brought a miracle of another sort. Even though there is a skeptic in me, sometimes I dare to expect more miracles. I put my hands on Ellen's legs. "My bones lit up like a Christmas tree on that last CAT scan," she told me. So I feel the healing love flow into the long leg bones. Ellen lies still, receptive and open.

She has changed so much. Love is flowing constantly in her life now. The old Ellen wouldn't let me get close to her. The old me would have been afraid to get close, had she invited me. She mixed good doses of anger with her feisty Irish zest and usually dominated our conversations. Now she listens, asks, shares, cares. Laughter still comes freely, but tears also have a place. I feel honored that she accepts and appreciates what I offer. I feel indebted to her; she always gives more than she is given. The love flows and Don Quixote seems to smile when I say, "Love is the miracle."

Yet always, there is this other prayer, this grand, bold request, "Let her be physically as well as spiritually whole." I embrace the paradox and fling this prayer against all that says, "Accept, let my will be God's will;" for I believe in the power of prayer, the influence of

intention, the possibility to transcend negativity, the power of love, the possible miracle.

Linda Lee is a member of First Friends Meeting, Indianapolis. She is the author of poems, essays, short stories and a non-fiction book in search of a publisher.

DROPPING TWO SUITCASES FULL OF BRICKS by Terri Mittenhall

It was my first session alone with Jim, our couples therapy counselor, and I was a little apprehensive. My husband had told me his approach involved prayer and memory, so I thought I knew a little about what to expect. I was already worrying that I wouldn't be able to produce an appropriate memory. I had had a near-idyllic childhood and could not see how it could possibly impact on my tendency to "beat myself up" because I have a chronic illness that places restraints on my life.

We started with Jim asking me to remember a recent event in which I felt frustrated with the limitations caused by my illness. "That's easy," I said with confidence, "last night." I had been part of a clearness committee. We were there to hold the focus person in the Light – be there in spirit, mind and body for the couple who was facing a very important issue. There were practical things to be done, as well as love to be given. At 9:00 my body crashed and took my mind along with it. Instead of holding another in the Light, my brain was yelling at me: "Are you going to fall out of the chair? Can you make it out the door? Thank goodness you don't have to drive!" The clearness committee was lost to me and I to it.

"Good," Jim said. "I want you to hold that memory while I pray. Lord, we ask that you bring Terri a memory that can help her see the truth about some mistaken core belief."

As I sat with the silence, almost immediately I was looking out of teenage eyes at my mother. We were in the house where I grew up. I watched her. She was constantly doing something; painting at her easel in the dining room, opening cans in preparation for dinner in the kitchen, going out the door to attend an art show with a friend. She was also dying of cancer. We didn't speak of it. We pretended it wasn't so. I never saw her lie down on the sofa or rest in the easy chair. I never heard her complain of pain or fatigue. I never saw her fear. Tears welled up in my eyes as I described the scene to Jim. I thought to myself, "I rest every day. I go slowly and sometimes not at all. I complain. I am afraid. And I'm not dying!"

"That's great. Hold on to all of that while I pray again." Jim then asked that the Lord speak to me about the truth in what I saw.

I held the memory and across thirty years *I heard my mother's voice* say, "Oh, honey, I wasn't always brave. You were my child. I didn't want you to see when I wasn't strong. I thought I was protecting you."

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Through my tears Jim prayed once more. "Lord, we thank you for what you have shown us today, and I ask that you might continue to show Terri even more as she goes through the weeks ahead."

The session was over and I walked the few blocks to my home through the full force of spring. Birds were singing, the sun was warming my face, and flowers were waving their heads in the breeze. Life surrounded me when the thought suddenly came, "*I don't have to do it the way my mother did.*" I dropped two suitcases full of bricks.

That afternoon I still needed a nap, just as I had every day that week, but for the first time I felt allowed to rest without guilt. I rested very well.

Terri Mittenhall is an attendee of Urbana-Champaign Meeting, Illinois. Her spiritual practice includes daily (mostly) meditation, and attention to the presence of God in all things. Another blessing her illness has given her is time to paint. She is always challenged to paint the Presence in the ordinary things she sees around her or within her.

PRAYING SOMEONE

by Allison Randall

I am a person who learns and understands best through pictures rather than words. Even as a child I found worded prayer awkward. I loved it and I did it, but whether the words were written by someone else or spoken spontaneously, they were never adequate for me.

Intercessory prayer is a kind of prayer I found *especially* difficult using words. Who am I to think that I (or the person who has asked me to pray for something specific for them) know what is best for this person? Who am I to ask God to please help so-and-so get this job she wants, or heal this person of cancer, or whatever? Doesn't God know better than me what job is right for this person, what journey this person needs? I found it impossible to pray, "Please let this person's test results be okay," but "Thy will be done" never did it for me either! That felt like just giving up, or copping out, turning my back.

And so it is that I discovered what one might call "visual prayer" – prayer that does not use words, but images. When this visual prayer is intercessory prayer, I call it "praying someone." I close my eyes, center myself in God, with God, waiting until I feel that I am sitting in the lap of God, or held in the hands of God, or that God fills my heart or permeates my whole being. Then I visualize the person for whom I am moved to pray. Sometimes I first see the person far away, and then the person walks towards me as if out of a mist. Sometimes the face of the person is clearly before me first, and sometimes this face has on it an exaggerated expression – of grief, of pain, of sadness – (which will frequently help me in my next in-the-flesh interchange with that person).

And then I imagine that person being bathed in the light of God. That “bathing” can be visually manifested for me in a variety of ways – sometimes a column of light comes down from above and envelopes them. Sometimes the person first develops a sort of glow, and the light then emanates from them. Usually the light throbs, as if it is Living Light. I sit in God, holding that image, holding that person in the Light, until the image fades, and then my prayer is over.

If I am praying for someone who needs physical healing, I figure that in some way I cannot fully comprehend, that Holy Light is divine energy which is healing energy, and it is permeating that person. I don’t know. My job is just the praying. My trying to figure out what it does has come from people coming to me and telling me what it is they have felt when they knew I was praying for them.

Once when I was on a clearness committee for someone, I could tell she felt abandoned, scared, alone. As she was talking to us I was “praying her.” And I saw behind her, quite clearly, not as if in a fog or a dream, but quite clearly, an angel, standing in back of the chair she was in, its wings spread ever so slightly, and curved ever so slightly over the woman’s shoulders, in a protective posture. I felt God was taking care of her.

Once I felt strongly moved to “pray someone” whom I did not know all that well, and did not even like all that much, and the urge to pray her was powerfully strong. So I prayed her, and I saw her sitting naked, her back to me, on a beach at the edge of the ocean. The Holy Light came down over her, and then she uncrossed her legs and sat with them wide apart as a small child might on the beach, and the waves of the ocean, calm and gently lapping waves, came up and lapped against, between, her outspread legs.

She was crying and crying; the pain in her heart was terrible – I could feel it in my own heart – and I sat with her in her pain as her tears poured into the ocean. It seemed as if not only the light was God, but the ocean too, or at least that it was holy, was healing. Every time I sat down to meditate (twice a day) for perhaps three or four weeks, the image of her sitting cross-legged by the ocean came to me, and every time I prayed her the same thing happened.

Weeks later I ran into her and asked her how she was. Very unlike her usual guarded self, she looked right into my eyes and said she had been going through terrible times with recently uncovered memories of childhood sexual abuse. But it was good work, and she was coming through it okay. My heart felt as if it stopped, and I felt that somehow I had invaded her privacy by “praying her” without first asking her permission... This asking of permission first is something I struggle with still.

When I pray someone, I feel as if I am stepping into a place of prayer, as if prayer is going on all the time and

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I am just choosing to enter into it, to participate in it. It is a very powerful, mystical feeling, a feeling I don’t understand any more than I understand the power of prayer. I myself am very small, just a part of a much larger Prayerfulness.

The most powerful experience of being in prayer happened to me fairly recently, when a woman asked me to pray for the physical healing of her son. A week or so before, I had been in a serious car accident, and my jaw was swollen and lumpy, disfigured and painful. At night when I fell asleep I cradled my jaw in my hands, doing Reiki (which to me is physical prayer) on my jaw and concentrating healing Light on the young man I had been asked to pray for. (Blessing two birds with one stone, so to speak.)

In the middle of the night I woke up, my hands still on my jaw. It felt like light woke me up – as if it were morning. It was lighter than morning, and we all were *in* the light: the woman who had asked me to pray for her son, and her husband and son were *in* prayer with me. We were all *in* prayer, as one is *in* the ocean, or *in* a room. *In* a space. A space that *is* prayer. *In* a light. A light that *is* Prayer. Prayer was there like a large forever-wide, forever-deep beam of light, and we were all in it, soaked in it, immersed in it. It was very powerful, and the *feeling* of the light was warm and bright, but it had a different quality than sunlight. Unbelievably calm. Indescribably deep, so rich rich... palpable... loving... incredibly beautiful. And all of us were in it. Together. And it was so *so* healing. So very *there*. So encompassing, imbuing. Incredible. It feels almost silly to even try to describe it in words, because all the words fall so short of the experience.

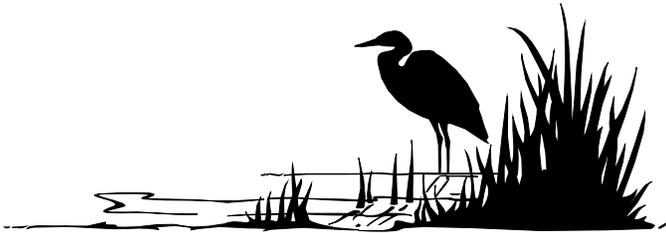
Allison Randall is a member of Monadnock Meeting in Jaffrey, NH. Her primary spiritual practices are meditating/worshipping/praying twice a day for 20 to 30 minutes each time, and trying to notice and acknowledge the presence of God as much as possible (the "possible" hopefully eventually growing to always). She is the mother of four and the grandmother of three.

Letter to the Editor:

I should like to comment on Bob Schmitt’s article, “On Spiritual Monogamy.” I am bothered by our Friend’s use of the word “dabbler.” It has, I feel, derogatory connotations. I think of myself as an eclectic.

My study of Hinduism, has, for me, clarified some Quaker teachings and practices. In the process I have acquired some vocabulary which one would not find in traditional Quakerism. This is the point where discernment is important. I notice that Bob Schmitt does not spell out precisely which Quaker tenets are getting neglected. I am a Quaker because I feel “at home” with the people, the tradition, the outlook and usually with the

practices. This doesn't mean I think Quaker tradition has all the answers. – Cecil Smith



and gifted Friends of their gifts, so that their writing that survives becomes more and more concerned with the spiritual correctness of their own faction as the time of separation approaches and finally arrives. Joseph Hoag's *Journal* is a case in point of this tendency. The times of separation do have something to teach modern Friends, but our historic faith and practice may be more clearly reflected in writings that date from periods when schism did not loom so large.

In Peace,
Lloyd Lee Wilson

FUTURE ISSUES

November 2000: VISIONS AND VOICES.

EDITOR: KATHY TAPP

Have you felt the presence of the Spirit through having a vision or hearing an audible voice, or a voice that speaks to the inward ear? Has the Spirit spoken through your other senses, a "holy fragrance," a "flavor," or sense of being physically touched? How do you recognize this as the Spirit? What meaning have you given it?

DEADLINE: September. 1.

February 2001: THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT IN QUAKER BUSINESS PROCESS.

EDITOR: PATRICIA MCBEE

Quaker business process is meant to be a time of opening ourselves to guidance and being channels of the Spirit in our world. Occasionally we actually feel that stunning presence in our meetings for business. We invite our readers to share with one another times when we have felt the hand of the Spirit guide our participation in a meeting for business, times when we came away deeply stirred, or times when a thorny problem dissolved in the ocean of light and love.

DEADLINE: December 1.

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Letter to the Editor:

I very much appreciated Bob Schmitt's article in the Fifth Month 2000 issue of *What Canst Thou Say?* There is Truth and power in many, many spiritual traditions. To find that Truth in all its fullness, however, requires a deep commitment to a particular spiritual path. Bob Schmitt's metaphor of spiritual monogamy reminds us of the deep love that can only be nurtured and sustained through one's complete devotion to a single partner.

Another metaphor that I have found useful is that of digging wells. We can find living water wherever we dig our well, but only if we devote the time and effort to dig our own well deep. When we do, we find that same living water that flows from each deep well; but we will never find that living water by digging a series of shallow wells scattered here and there.

The only caution I would add concerns Bob Schmitt's emphasis on reading our history "particularly periods around the separations." The intense experience of the separations tended to drain even the most seasoned

Please write for WCTS

What Canst Thou Say? is a worship sharing group in print. It gets its energy from the generous sharing of readers with one another. Articles can be from 350 to 1500 words. Please submit your writing to Amy Perry 6180 N. Ralston, Indianapolis, IN 46220 or mail us a disk in Microsoft Word or generic text format. Thanks!

May 2001: SOLITUDE. EDITOR: LINDA C. LEE

We may come to solitude through following our yearning, through circumstances of fate, or may choose it as a deliberate practice. Has solitude enlarged your soul, expanded your awareness, fulfilled your yearning? Has solitude led toward knowing "that of God" within? What relationship have you found between solitude and service? Has the value of spending time alone changed during your spiritual development?

DEADLINE: March 1.

