



Number 46
May 2005

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

Spiritual Emergence(y)

In the Blood of the Wound

Lisa Greber

In the blood of the wound, an old saying goes, lies the healing of the wound. In the summer of 2000, I wandered between the worlds, first in ecstasy and later in horror. Perhaps you have been there? I felt like spirit become flesh and saw the world as if for the first time, morning glories and tomatoes and the sky reaching off to infinity, so beautiful I wept in awe—joy married to terror. Later it got worse.

How did it happen? I wish I knew. Chance, history, biochemistry, God, something I brought on myself? For perhaps nine months before my wanderings, I engaged in an intense process of spiritual exploration and healing, using a technique that I later found closely mimicked Eugene Gendlin's focusing (see www.focusing.org).

Focusing is a body-oriented attention practice that helps translate kinesthetic knowledge into articulate, conscious knowledge. It can be used for therapy, art, decision-making, and spiritual practice. I used it to redeem places of pain—to transform the wounds we all carry from childhood or whatever we have suffered—into places of wisdom, holy places. Spiritual practice is a little like fire—it is warming in the fireplace, but can burn down the house if left unsupervised. I found my most fundamental values

and senses of self in conflict. I couldn't figure out a resolution. In retrospect simply leaving the situation would have been a good answer. I didn't have a teacher who might have told me this would be a great time to use my spiritual (focusing) practice, and shown me how. Instead, in desperation, I smashed the two warring sides together. (If you have warring selves, do not do this! Let them come to-

gether gently, over time, if they wish.) Twelve hours later I broke in awe.

After I left the hospital, I was haunted by what Christianity calls The Accuser and I believe focusing calls The Critic, the one who says your sins are deep and numerous and mortal, and you are destined to suffer forever. I was deeply afraid.

So I went back—with help. I asked myself, in the body-listening

From the Editor:

New spiritual understandings, visions, voices, or bodily sensations may break through suddenly. Family and friends may fear for our mental health. As we move from a secular center to a sacred one, the breaking open that invites the healing of psychological, emotional or spiritual wounds can be profoundly disorienting; spiritual emergence becomes spiritual emergency. Eventually, with love, grace, good teachers, and nonjudgmental listeners, the dualities and opposites meet, clash and resolve. That of God lives within our bodies.

The universe aches to open us to bigger boxes than the too-small ones which conform to the consensus reality of our culture. Mystical experiences are an important way to open to our connection with the divine, the source that will show us better ways. Yet, often we do not have the tools for navigation and pathology ensues. We can choose to learn new tools so we can embrace our connection to that which is bigger than us. Once we get through this emergence, we are called back into the world with a voice that is deeper and stronger.

Every single story is a blessing. Thank you to all who submitted their stories; some will be published in future issues. Thank you to Kathy Tapp and Mariellen Gilpin for editing this issue with me! And thank you God for all of it!

Jennifer Elam, Guest Editor

of focusing: what is this voice, what does it need, what is its redeemed self? Who would be able to yell so loudly about what I had done wrong, unless it was someone who knew what was right, who loved what was right and wanted me to follow that? Who is behind the mask of anger?

Focusing is like a movie in your belly, images built into your flesh. I sat and watched. The Critic roared about my imperfections and failures. This took place in my body and imagination. I sat in meditation. The critic was accurate and remembered how little I had done to meet the needs of this earth, and when I had failed to protect the innocent. I sat. My image was of a storm at sea, only somehow on dry land. "What do you need?" I asked. The land heaved.

Then in what Gendlin calls the moment of grace, the felt sense shifted—a change that can be measured in the biochemistry of the brain. We do not create it; we can only wait. Under my attention the land quieted; the mask dropped. In the newly empty space I came to myself in a white robe, carrying a candle of perfect fire.

What is the Critic's redemption? It is the prophet's voice, crying for the undrinkable rivers, a child's hunger, and the warming seas. It is our fury at the wealth in the hands of the few, and the ragged desperate lives of the many. It knows what is right, and will point the way. It would like us to lead our lives in accordance with the highest dictates of our spirits. It is our conscience, and our nobleness. It is our guide. This is the gift from my terror. Your demons, too, redeemed, can carry the knowledge of your spirit. May you have all the help and companions you need. My prayers go with you to that place of grace where love transforms fear into knowledge and healing. In the blood

of the wound lies the healing of the wound, and spring, and resurrection.

Lisa Greber does spiritually oriented ecology education. She is grateful to all who have been on this journey with her, especially her sister Rebecca, and her packmembers Anka, Josie, Baby, and Little Kitty, for helping keep body and soul together.



Walk as Children of Light

Diann Herzog

Almost from my first meeting for worship, I began having experiences that I couldn't easily explain to myself or others. I hadn't done any background reading on Quakers and hadn't known anyone who was a Quaker. I found my way into a meetinghouse by way of a Historical Society meeting, and just being in the building set something off in me. I felt a strong sense of being called, and was compelled to come back to find out more. I had only been in meeting for worship two or three times when I received the first message: *Christ is living inside us. He is seeing through our eyes. We carry him in our bodies.* I melted, I trembled, I wept; I opened my mouth and let the words come through. I had never heard anyone speak in meeting, didn't yet know that this is a physical manifestation of the Spirit in Quaker worship. Afterwards I felt deeply embarrassed and totally at a loss for

What Canst Thou Say? is an independent publication by and for Quakers with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. It's published in August, November, February, and May. The editorial and production team is Lissa Field, Mariellen Gilpin, Lieselotte Heil, Judy Lumb, Patricia McBee, Grayce Mesner, Amy Perry, Carol Roth, Kathy Tapp, Eleanor Warnock, and Margaret Willits.

Please write for WCTS! Instructions to authors are on page 9. Send editorial correspondence to <m-gilpin@uiuc.edu> or WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820. See the WCTS website for a history of WCTS and updated queries for future issues: <http://www.geocities.com/what_canst_thou_say>

Subscriptions are \$8 for one year, \$15 for two years. Back issues are \$1.50 each, \$15 for a partial set (Issue 1-20, 21-40), and \$40 for complete set. Email subscriptions are \$5 per year. Subscription correspondence should be directed to Margaret Willits at <mwillits@alum.swarthmore.edu> or P.O. Box 5082, Sonora CA 95370.

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explanation. And there was no comfort from the other Friends in meeting that day. I went home thoroughly shaken. I wondered if what had happened was real. But at the same time, there was a truth and solidity about the message. I knew whatever it was I had heard and felt was real and true. It was the certainty of the message, how deeply and completely it had spoken to and from my soul, that carried me back to meeting and forward into Quakerism. It has been that soul recognition, that experience of Christ within, that has sustained me.

I consider myself blessed to have come through this and many other intense and powerful experiences without losing myself or my way forward.

There are several things that have safeguarded me. Most important is that everlasting Presence that called to me in the first place, that soul within that is my own and yet greater than my own, that tells me I am safe and loved. Next is my husband, who even though he professes to be a non-believer, has listened to every word, every detailed description of my experiences and withheld comment. The act of listening is so very powerful. I can't emphasize that enough. Just to be listened to when I was vulnerable and fragile was a balm to my rawness. Listening is love.

I have also been blessed to have found a couple of experienced and trustworthy Friends who continue to assure me that I haven't lost my mind, that these kinds of experiences aren't unheard of, and who have guided me to the right books at the right time. At the beginning of this journey, I had very little knowledge of the Bible, but scripture has come to be my touchstone. That is where I find personal guidance, correction and assurance. The first hand experiences of the prophets assure me that yes, God does speak to us directly at times; the lives and the

writings of the disciples affirm my passion for Christ and the living, breathing words of God; the Holy Spirit speaks now in a way I couldn't hear before.

Diann Herzog is clerk of Fall Creek Meeting, Pendleton, Indiana, and an affiliate member of Stillwater Meeting, Ohio Yearly Meeting (Conservative). She is called to wear plain dress.



Grace

Karen Trueheart

*Come, light softly on my grief
and stay awhile.*

After long, full lives they would depart in character, my mother following her husband, my father. As their time approached, the night nurse left the window open just a crack so their spirits could come and go. In the morning she reported: *A tall man stood at the end of the bed. Your Dad raised his hand in greeting. Three women sat with me through the night.*

Being with dying was unfamiliar to me. The responsibility of seeing both my beloved parents through their passing was overwhelming, even with the help of family and nurses. Our parents wanted to die peacefully at home. We wanted to make sure they felt the love and caring they had given in such abundance. We just weren't sure we knew how to do it.

When I'd take a moment to rest, I noticed I was buzzing, shaking like one of those 25 cent vibrating beds in a cheap motel. And I felt I was on fire. *Menopause*, said the doctors. *Kundalini*, said my Tibetan Buddhist friends. *Spiritual emergency*, chimed in my psychology colleagues.

I was totally confused by what was happening, but sensed I was being called. To what? I did not know. What was clear was that responding was not a matter of choice. *You're being rewired*, said my teacher and Jungian analyst Marion Woodman, *from secular circuits to sacred*. I, who had left my cradle religion long ago, was being asked to take the journey inward to God.

My parents died in the spring of 1993. In the months that followed, my physical condition became more and more debilitating. I could barely walk, let alone be athletically active, as had been my nature. Bright light and noise were increasingly painful. I was forced into a meditative, monastic lifestyle by default. In the stillness, visions appeared, guiding my journey. My grief transformed itself into a longing and passion for God. I had read accounts of nuns describing themselves as Christ's lovers. I was being swept away by devotion and divine love. I tried to express what was happening in poetry.

*You ask me to love you.
But I will never taste the wetness of
your breath
mingling with mine.*

*Nor feel the warm softness of your
skin
as heart and flesh entwine.*

*So, how can I stand in this gale of
loving
absorbing the zap and sizzle of your
lightning
and not be turned to smoke?*

*You...you ask me to love you
But I, I ask you how?*

How to love God—to express this devotion—led me to the California Institute of Integral Studies, to the Spiritual Emergence Network, and to a community that could help me find

answers, direction, and God's wisdom within me. A psychology course led me to the Hindu tradition of Advaita Vedanta and my spiritual teachers. An encounter with Sufi mystic Rumi helped me give voice to divine love and longing. Professors, friends, spiritual teachers and practices all gave guidance. Looking back over the 12 years since this journey began I am filled with gratitude.

I have come home to God.

*You asked me to let you love me.
And when I opened to your loving you
entered softly,
from out of no where.
As if my soul dipped its cup into the
waters of a mirage
And came up full.*

Spiritual Practice

*You ask me for silence.
Silence? I say silence is for roses,
fragrant, thorny and mute.*

*I sing with the cardinal, the whale and
the wolf
in the chorus of the Infinite.
We raise our voices in celebration of
Being.
Should I hold back my song to harmo-
nize with silence?*

*You ask me for suffering.
Suffering? I say suffering is for saints
with begging bowls
and power brokers smugly bundled in
success and acceptability.*

*I surf with the otter, the dolphin and
the seal
on the Seas of Delight.
We frolic in praise of The Mystery.
Should I wipe off this froth of playfulness
to don the heavy cloak of suffering?*

You ask me for stillness.

*Stillness? I say stillness is for moun-
tains, ancient, majestic, and
deep.*

*I boogie with the stars, the wind and
the moon.*

*We two-step to the Tunes of the Uni-
verse and the*

Cadence of Creation.

*Should I keep my spirit from dancing
so my soul can sway in silence?*

*Or move over...and make room on this
dance floor for you*

Karen Trueheart's life is her spiritual practice—from laundry to counseling, from writing to prayer. She is a member of Christ Episcopal Church, and a student of Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism.

Christ is Risen

Emma Laughton

Sometimes in my spiritual journey, there has been overwhelming intensity and it has been manageable; at other times it has been unmanageable. I have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, have suffered delusions and the kind of psychotic breakdown which we readily associate with the description madness.

At other times I have felt that God was doing something new with me in a powerful but less dramatic way, and it is one of these occasions I want to tell you about now.

I did not have a crystallized or socially accepted personal faith. So when I was most ill and I felt the power of Christ bringing me through the trauma, it was not clear how I should understand it. Delusions made me lose confidence in my ability to understand and test reality. I lived with a difficult dilemma. Had I discovered something about ultimate reality when my mind was apparently most disordered? Or

was this the biggest delusion of all? Should I follow the stirrings of my heart which led me toward something called God—or should I maintain the sensible outlook I knew, that had no real place for something as intangible as divine activity in the world?

I didn't know how to communicate about my experiences or who could understand. Several years went by. Work, marriage and family all kept me busy. I was confirmed in the Church of England. But I still had unresolved problems and questions.

Our parish church is a wonderful mediaeval building, its size reflecting the comparative importance that our now-tiny town held in the 15th and 16th century wool economy. It has unusually large windows giving a bright, airy and yet reflective, peaceful, even mysterious feeling. It is a place where the living Spirit can be felt.

One late afternoon in Lent I sat in the south aisle a long time. I was next to a window with a large modern stained glass depiction of the Risen Christ striding away from the empty tomb. A part of the wall turns at right angles by this window, and I gradually became aware in the emptiness and stillness that as the sun sank, the coloured shadow of the stained glass moved on this wall. The image of the Christ had reached a point where it was perfectly focused on the wall; and he was looking down at me from there as a living presence. That moment of power and reverence made a deep impression as I waited while the sun moved on round and the vision faded.

The peace and calm of this vision contrasted favorably with some of my other experiences. I was fascinated by the combination of the numinous moment with the unusual but completely unmiraculous and non-delusional phenomenon produced by the sun, the window and the wall. Here, too, was an

event which would not have happened in the way it did without the vehicle of the human faith which created the stained glass, and yet which seemed to reveal a glimpse of the hidden glory beyond the boundaries of space and time. It was an event I treasured and could not forget.

I talked to the rector occasionally, who was always supportive of my searching. So one day I hesitantly told him about this occasion, while he listened and didn't rush to add any interpretation. I described my thoughts and feelings tentatively, then asked, *Have you experienced that too?* He nodded quietly and seriously: *Yes I have.* That was an important moment: to be able to express the fact that something mattered, with a significance beyond any banal rationalistic explanation, and to share meaningfully with a person I respected.

Unless we can communicate and find common ground, there's little opportunity to heal from psychological fracture, or receive the spiritual gifts of love and growth which appear sometimes at the most unexpected moments. Too often, people who have had psychiatric problems find that everything they say and do thereafter is automatically discounted. No wonder most of us are so terrified of going crazy, even for a short while, if that is one of the results. This fear hinders understanding that times of disturbance are often an intrinsic part of the journey towards a deeper awareness of humanity and connection with God.

Emma Laughton lives in Devon, England with her husband, an artist, and their two children. They run a small art gallery; Emma also works in libraries and in the field of mental health. She is active in the Church of England.



Valley Encounter

William Migliaccio

Thus saith the Lord: because the Arameans have said, 'The Lord is a god of the hills but he is not a god of the valleys,' therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord. (I Kings 20:28 NESV)

My life was like a long arctic winter where the sun was ever absent: no light, no warmth, seemingly a wasteland devastated by inner warring. I was angry and seeking acceptance, and like Cain, I became a fugitive and wanderer on the earth. I lived like a fool and so came to a fool's end. Therein lies no surprise.

In the winter of 1978 I turned 21 in a maximum security prison serving a life sentence. I was alone in a cell, angry, confused and frightened. I paced back and forth, striking out on the steel bars of the cell, sometimes yelling and cursing, sometimes crying. Eventually I prayed without knowing that was what I was doing—I had never prayed before.

I was hopeless, filled with despair, desperate for answers. Why, why had my life taken such a path? Why me? There was no one to turn to, and nowhere to turn except inward. Seeking. So intense. Then the Light—an awareness of the presence that was not me. I was startled, yet curious. I felt no fear, just a growing comfort as the awareness increased. I felt a warmth, yet not exactly a heat. And then I was aware of a voice that was not mine. It is impossible to explain. Reaching out

spiritually, I submitted to a stronger will. I beseeched, *Tell me why. I need to know.*

The only answer I received at that time was, *Go to school!* Three words and nothing more. It was a command, neither shouted nor demanding; firm, confident, convincing, and loving. *But I want to know now!* Again the only response was, *Go to school!* And then I felt complete submission and acknowledgement of this will not my own. *I love you,* was all I could say.

And I was healed. My hurting was gone. My anger was gone. I was forgiven and I forgave all those who I believed had ever wronged me. My lust for alcohol was taken from me. I felt a peaceful inner calm I had never known before. My sense of self was the same, but somehow different too. I felt a new

sense of purpose, a sense of wonder. But too, I had an inner questioning: *What in the world has just happened?*

I had no name for it. I was like the lame man in John 5:13-15 who was unable to answer when asked who had healed him because he *did not know who it was.* Only later would the man learn and be able to proclaim *It was Jesus who made him well.*

Today I know that my God is a god of the mountains as well as of the valleys. My God was with me down in the deepest darkest valley of the shadow of evil, down where I could no longer walk and barely crawled. My God came into the heart of a maximum security prison, into a stark, cold, lonely jail cell and into the heart of a very badly broken human being. And my God forgave me, and healed me and lifted me up. I loved my God

Seeking. So intense. Then the Light—an awareness of the presence that was not me.

then, down in the depths, and I love my God now when I have grown spiritually higher.

It was many years before I would be able to understand my valley encounter in the proper context, but I was never abandoned. I did not have to navigate this experience alone, and whether I call them God's angels or Jesus' lambs, there were many people who came to me and helped in my education and growth.

In 1992 I encountered Friends. In 1996, during my first Friends meeting and while in silent worship, I felt an immediate recognition of the presence I had experienced during my valley encounter. That meeting gave me a feeling of peace and a sense of having come home, and of belonging.

We often talk about the sun rising or setting. Of course that is never true. The sun is a constant, and it has always been in the same place. It is our earth that turns and moves so that we either see and experience the sun or we do not. In much the same way I know that the Spirit did not so much emerge, but rather I turned and moved towards it during a time of desperate need. But the Spirit of the Lord, the Light Within, was always there. More importantly, I know it always will be.

William Migliaccio attended a prison Friends Worship Group but currently has no meeting to attend. He appreciates the ministry of letters from Friends. His address: 78-B-1489 Groveland Correctional Facility, 7000 Sonyea Road, Sonyea, NY 14556.



A Transcendent Wholeness

Marjorie Ball

My story began in Lancashire, England in 1974. I was married, with two small children, and was a new communicant member of a liberal Anglican church. The possibility of directly experiencing God had not entered my imagination.

Then, out of the blue, I had a series of experiences which felt as if they came from some mysterious source. It was as if I was taken up into a different order of being and consciousness. It felt as if I was in the presence of truth, a truth which came as paradoxes. Opposites such as light and dark, inner and outer, were held together by a transcendent wholeness which was

A spiritual emergency was necessary. My inflated ego had to be transformed.

mysterious yet joyous. I had no context whatsoever for understanding what was happening.

During those four days when I felt in connection with this mysterious presence it was as if a voice said to me, *Well, hello! You made it. Which way did you come?* This question implied whatever I was experiencing could be arrived at by a variety of paths. This implied the exclusivity of some forms of Christian belief must be wrong.

After four days my mystical experiences came to an end. But weeks later I entered into a depression which deepened to such intensity I began to fear that I might be going mad. It ended with this dream: *I was offered the Kingdom of Heaven, the acceptance*

of which meant that I would die. This was not a frightening suggestion, but rather quite beautiful. I had a choice. I decided to turn the offer down and return to the world with the explicit intention of helping others come to this Kingdom. The next morning my depression lifted as mysteriously as it had arrived.

This was all very strange; I had no context for it until I came to study Buddhism. Here I learned about the Bodhisattvas—those beings who chose to delay Nirvana in order to help others achieve it. This was so close to my dream experience that I was taken aback. *Am I a bodhisattva?* I secretly asked myself. This was unnerving stuff!

I unfortunately developed a misplaced sense that if I were not mad, then God must have something very special for me to do. I thought there was some sort of grandiose role for me to play. With hindsight, I realize that for about 18 years I lived in a kind of nagging state of ego inflation combined with a huge fear of being overwhelmed by the enormity of it all.

In 1992 during a period of psychotherapy, this unstable bubble burst. A spiritual emergency was necessary. My inflated ego had to be transformed. It began as a brief and painful regression to a preegoic condition from which I could begin to rebuild my life. Then I entered into a difficult dark night journey accompanied by my supportive therapist. Through a gift of grace, I came to realize I had been unconsciously worshipping something making impossible demands on me—not an unconditionally loving God. Receiving God's totally accepting love enabled me gradually to develop a realistic compassion for myself. This in turn enabled me to offer love to others. Such compassion is at the heart of the Bodhisattva vow taken by some Buddhists. Asking myself *Am I a*

bodhisattva? turned out to be such an unfortunate question, laden as it was with the potential for ego inflation. It created a blind spot. That has gone now and my God, I realize, is more of a verb than a noun.

Today I am uncomfortable with a dualism that has Gods and Bodhisattvas in a different realm to humanity. My experience sits more comfortably in paradox. Such paradox permeates the writings of Meister Eckhart; Buddhists describe it as *the emptiness which is suchness*; some quantum scientists in the 1930's found it to be the context for the new physics. It is, I believe, what I inadvertently stumbled upon all those years ago—God and I are held in a mysterious and mutual relationship of sheer joy.

When I think about what was helpful throughout all this, I would say having the right people to share it with. It is Jennifer Elam who has been the encouragement for what I have been able to write here and my heartfelt thanks go out to her.

Marjorie Ball worships in Lancaster Meeting, in 1652 country, England. She occasionally is an associate tutor on deepening the spiritual life at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Center.

Word from The Trenches

Mariellen Gilpin

In the fall of 1978, at the age of 38, I was taken to the psychiatric ward of the local hospital because I heard many voices, among them God and Jesus. God did not abandon me to my disabilities and maladjustments—as I worked on my spiritual illness the mental illness became easier to manage.

From my experience, I offer these strategies for a spiritual person coping

with the modern medical/psychiatric world. A few are specific to my own situation, but most may be of wider use.

I have a medical advocate—a family member or good friend. No one should have to deal alone with a doctor in a hurry. I make a list of questions beforehand, but I can't think fast enough to ask the followup questions. I choose an advocate with good question-asking skills.

I choose a psychiatrist carefully. Danger signs include giving heavy medications, giving several different drugs at once (upsetting the body's equilibrium), an overly parental attitude, and strange behaviors like giving a mental patient a pelvic exam or displaying a large portrait over his desk—of himself. A doctor who makes the blanket assertion, *Jesus doesn't talk to people*, is not a good choice for a spiritual person. (A friend who is a nurse can ask around—nurses always know the danger signs.)

I make sure I'm with people I trust during medication changes. There may be hair-raising times while we find out which med works and how much. But it's important to be patient; psychiatry is an art and not a science, and every body is different.

I do my homework. For example, when the doctor suggests a new medication, I read the (almost unintelligible) package insert. I weigh the risks and benefits of my current medication against those of the new one before agreeing to change. Before I see my therapist, I consider what issues I want to bring up; I make notes of her remarks, and I journal my thoughts afterwards. When I hallucinate, I reflect on what my hallucinations tell

me about myself. I try to regain reality, because if I am sane most of the time, hallucinations don't take such firm hold when they happen.

I behave as if I'm sane. I try to do what good ordinary people do, and avoid what good ordinary people avoid. I get up early and work an eight-hour day, whether I hallucinate or not, whatever sort of work I can do. Work can be a lifeline to sanity. Being socially useful builds a bridge to normalcy and self-esteem.

I seek a diversity of support systems. I will describe some supports that have been important to me: My husband. He has been wonderfully supportive and wise in his dealings with the many challenges of my illness. He

is so eminently sane and stable that I always have known the location and attractiveness of reality—a gift many mental patients

do not have at home. He has been my medical advocate since day one.

My meeting. Ours is a small meeting, so everybody knew I had a psychotic break. Nobody, least of all me, has to pretend. I reach out to many. There have been disappointments, but most Friends have been helpful in ways available to them. I have tried not to lean unreasonably, and Friends find ways to make our relationships mutually helpful: the Friend who took me to the emergency room one night let me hold her while she wept a few months later. And many in meeting behave as if the essential Mariellen is still in here somewhere. Their faith helps my light shine forth now and again.

A Twelve Step group called GROW. In GROW the mentally ill can and do lead each other to wholeness.

A doctor who says "Jesus doesn't talk to people" is not a good choice.

In time I became a leader, and grew immensely as a result of the challenges of unreasonably dependent people who acted out in meetings. (One fellow threw a table during a meeting.) I grew also in compassion as I learned the lovely human beings inside some unpleasant shells. I learned to speak out in love, instead of withholding feedback. Confidence in one's ability to cope with stress is the greatest challenge a recovering mental patient faces. GROW increased my confidence.

Therapists. Twelve years into my illness, I insisted the doctor refer me for counseling. I needed to talk. One counselor was too ingrained in the medical model of mental illness to help someone with a strongly spiritual bent. I sought out a counselor who could focus on my issues rather than on evaluating my spirituality.



I interview a therapist before I agree to work with her. I ask two questions: First, *I would be the first to tell you I hear voices that unhinge my mind and disorganize my life. But sometimes—sometimes—I hear the voice of God, and that voice is helpful. Can we deal?* This question quickly sorts out the knee-jerk anti-God people who exist in the mental health profession (even though the vast majority of mental patients believe in God). The right answer is a hearty, *If it's helpful, go for it!* A second question is, *Can you simply focus on my issues and at least be agnostic about the source of my issues?* A firm *Yes!* is the only answer I

will accept. In addition, I like humor, common sense, warmth, intelligence, and a thoughtful approach to life. Sometimes I am lucky enough to find someone spiritual.

Clergy. For four years, I talked regularly with two different clergymen. I found their knowledge of spiritual lore helpful.

A Committee of Care. Sixteen years into my illness, I needed heavy-duty spiritual guides. I asked my meeting for a Committee of Care, which met with me every few weeks and prayed for me every night at bedtime (nights were my most vulnerable time). We spent 45 minutes in worship because the Committee needed to be deeply centered to deal with my intensity. The silent worship helped me in two ways: first, it helped me drop the barriers I erected in order to appear as sane as possible. Since I was freed by the silence to say what was really happening, the Committee was freed really to help me. Secondly, the silence helped me deeply listen to the Committee. I could let myself be helped.

A Celtic shaman with the gift of discerning spirits. The Committee of Care recommended him, and he worked within our Quaker setting, even though he was Greek Orthodox. The Committee had worked with him in other situations. I accepted him after performing my own discernment process: I wanted someone with the spiritual power to make it stop, but I also wanted someone who was not on a power trip—not with me, not with any troubling spirits. Spirits are God's children, too. The Celtic shaman was a wise, kind man; he stayed on the Committee to help me regain stability.

My best recourse in recovery has been to seek advice and to listen: listen to friends and family, listen to therapists and spiritual helpers, listen to myself, listen to God. I use my best judgment

when advisors disagree, and try always to learn from my mistakes.

Mariellen Gilpin celebrates the many ways God has helped her deal with mental illness.

An Important Addition to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual

Jean Roberts

An addition or change to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) (the bible of psychiatrists and others in the medical field) often takes years to be accepted by the editors and added to the new edition. So in 1991, as Robert Turner, M.D. (a former member of the Kundalini Research Network), Francis Lu, M.D., and David Lukoff, Ph.D., made their submission to the fourth edition, they were prepared to have it debated a long time. Those who knew about this project were cautiously optimistic. Miraculously, the submission was accepted for publication in the DSM-IV under a non-pathological category. It appears as follows:

Religious or Spiritual Problem: *This category can be used when the focus of clinical attention is a religious or spiritual problem. Examples include distressing experiences that involve loss or questioning of faith, problems associated with conversion to a new faith or questioning of spiritual values that may not necessarily be related to an organized church or religious institution.*

The Less I Said

Jean Roberts

My spiritual awakening or spontaneous Kundalini experience occurred in 1984, before the change to the DSM. Even though I was given mind-altering drugs during my ten-day stay in a psychiatric facility, I was continually comforted and sustained by the energy of love. I was coming to know this love as the most powerful force, with which nothing could compete. I was guided continuously and had no fear. In my student nurse days, I had learned a little about psychiatry, and so I knew the less I said about my experience, the sooner I would be discharged. Upon leaving, I talked with a psychiatrist who told me to *stay away from the occult and anything else I didn't understand*. At that time there was no explanation for what I was experiencing. I couldn't be put in a category with a label. The change in DSM-IV may help people avoid a pathological diagnosis and a label of mental illness.

[Jean's account of her spiritual awakening can be found in Jen Elam's book, *Dancing with God Through the Storm*, and Jen's chapter from *Ways of Knowing: Science and Mysticism Today*, Chris Clarke (ed.) (2005). To order, contact jenelam@aol.com.]

Jean Roberts is a member of Eastside (Washington) Meeting and North Pacific Yearly Meeting. She has been a Quaker for over 30 years and is a co-founder of What Canst Thou Say?



Softly Held Through the Storm

Eileen Bagus

Changes were happening so rapidly. One dark evening I heard a terrified voice which seemed to be in the yard, yelling my name loudly. I turned on the lights, but no one was there. I knelt down and asked God to help this person, whoever it was. Next afternoon one of my students came to my office at the university and, to my shock, explained that yesterday he'd over-dosed on street drugs and thought he was dying. From some miles away, he had cried out to me in terror, and felt a sense of peace and safety enfold him. It was apparent to both of us that prayer works. An intuitive sense seemed to be opening in me. God was chiseling away at my rational blinders, tutoring me.

A few months before our divorce, my husband and I attended a major international philosophy conference on the campus of Tulane University in New Orleans. Although it was an ideal setting to advance one's career, I could hardly bear to sit through any sessions or try to make professional contacts. I meditated and walked in the large Audubon Park across the street, feeling remote. My life was over-turned from what it was even a year before, and yet somehow I wasn't worried.

Starting out on a walk across the park to sit on the banks of the Mississippi, I opened to a chapter on which I was preparing a lecture. A tall Hispanic man strolled up and asked if he could walk with me, saying he was a physics major. He looked at my open book and said the article, on Aquinas's proofs for the existence of God, was one of his favorites. At first I thought this was a

Tell Us Your Stories!

What Canst Thou Say is a worship-sharing group in print. Its richness comes from the generous sharing of readers with one another.

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—The Editorial Team of WCTS:
Mariellen Gilpin, Judy Lumb, Pat McBee, Kathy Tapp, Eleanor Warnock

really lame pickup line, but he started discussing the article with me in depth. I asked him what he was doing in the park. He said he liked to observe crazy people—many were attracted to the park and they could be quite interesting. I was pretty sure he might be trying to tell me something.

Minutes after I said good bye to him, a surly band of a dozen young boys surrounded me. Steeling myself for the worst, I heard a roar and saw flailing arms scattering them. *I knew I couldn't leave you alone*, he said. We walked back to Tulane talking. I had never had a conversation with such a clear, logical, scientific, philosophical, even metaphysical person. To make sure I wasn't totally crazy and imagining all this, I asked the student to meet my husband and talk over dinner. My husband, too, could scarcely believe

the breadth and depth of understanding that was being poured out to us. What would be the probability of being approached, then rescued by such an extraordinary one in a park? At times I have wondered if this really was a student, but I knew that day God had provided me protection and further understanding.

I really needed to sit in silent prayer. I walked to the campus church expecting peace, but the church was full of people. Choirs were singing; lights and candles blazed. *What's happening?* I asked a photographer. He said, *They're consecrating the new archbishop of New Orleans.*

I thought, *What a special moment to stumble into for a person seeking a quiet place to pray!* In minutes all was still. I knelt alone, earnestly asking God what to do. A strong voice which seemed to come from outside me spoke: *I want you to be of service to me!* A thought of Mother Teresa of Calcutta came to me—I didn't want to be a nun and have always been afraid if I truly followed God's will, I would be asked to do something I couldn't bear. *Dear God, I don't know if I can make it without a husband and children.* The voice replied, *Whatever the deepest needs of your heart, they shall be granted.* I felt washed over with mercy and peace.

This watershed deepened my spiritual beliefs, but my husband was sure I was going insane. He called my mother and sister, who phoned my best

friend, now a psychiatrist. She thought it could be a psychotic episode. They decided to see if I could quiet down without medication or hospitalization, so long as I didn't harm myself or anyone else. For this I was really grateful. I spent time meditating, walking, and talking with my husband until we got home. I wanted to be alone a lot, meditating, reading, talking with a couple of close friends, and crying over all the life changes. My mother and sister tried to be kind and helpful, but didn't know what to do.

A spiritual support committee would have been beneficial. After some months I started seeing a therapist, but this didn't feel satisfying. I took a year off work, did a lot of study, talked with many people, and took workshops. Everything helped to some extent in getting me grounded, helping me sort things out and reintegrate my life. The process continues, just not so dramatically. God has been guiding and protecting me.

As I was deciding whether or not to write this piece, my daily meditation book closed with this passage: Deuteronomy 4:9: *But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children.*

Eileen Bagus is a member of Community Friends Meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio. She is happy a publication like WCTS exists.

Love and Fear

Shirley Lane

A diversity of mystical experiences that filled my life reached a pinnacle when a spiritual emergenc(y) taught me the power of love and fear.

The unexpected emergence did not induce fear because the mystical had unfolded through my life in loving ways. However, others had a different view, rooted in fear. The energy of fear disturbed my equilibrium and only keeping love as my focus restored it.

When spiraling Kundalini energy propelled me into supra-conscious mind, I knew the ground of my being, interconnectedness and unconditional love, and I understood what wholeness was. I fought to maintain this perspective when fear arose in those around me.

Although I knew the divine nature of my experience, my doctor, lacking knowledge of spiritual emergencies, admitted me to a psychiatric unit for three weeks. The psychiatrists rejected my interpretation, and their dismissive responses left me unsupported. I was consigned to a wilderness with those who refuse to conform to consensus reality. Having my perspective rejected shattered my integrity and instilled a fear of losing my sense of self. Without preparation, facilitation, or appropriate psychological aftercare, the awakening resulted in emotional vulnerability that fed depression. I was unable to work, and we slid into economic crisis. Housekeeping was a struggle, and I could not face social interaction. This loss of normal life made me afraid, and my family, feeling helpless, mirrored my fears.

I remembered the love I had experienced and fought back, realizing I must conquer fear, surrender to circumstance, and allow time and space to heal. Understanding friends

Deuteronomy 4:9

But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children.



provided healing, craniosacral work and massage to physically discharge the energy spiral. This, together with their love and acceptance, was a helpful first step.

I recognized I must make the fundamental choice between love and fear. Love enhanced my connection to all that is and released the strength that comes from heart-centred faith. Lapses into fear clouded perception, leaving me adrift in an unbearable existential loneliness. I fought the fear with affirmations and mantras. I steadied my emotions by focusing on my heart area, repeating my mantra, *I choose Love*, until I calmed. I worked with *A Course in Miracles* daily, meditated, and prayed.

My mind, having worked at lightning speed during the emergence, needed rest. I acknowledged my body's need for rest, nutritious food and peaceful space.

I had not been allowed an acceptable context in which to place my experience. Denial of opportunity to reconstruct my identity, or a framework to govern my thinking, affected my ability to function or communicate coherently. I was bereft of language to express my truth.

Recuperating, I sought language to clothe my expanded understanding. I attempted communication to close friends capable of nonjudgmental listening, and named and framed my beliefs. Close family remained fearful at the loss of my old self, but I had to articulate my truth.

I agreed to be a case study for a doctor researching spontaneous Kundalini events. My story was at last accepted by someone representing medicine. This led me to attend conferences devoted to psychosis and spirituality. An ongoing discussion group provided a context for expression and the unconditional listening I yearned for. I thanked God for this connection.

I reflected on my battle with fear. Losing sight of love had caused fear to manifest. My shattered body had disturbed my perception, and the fear within others fueled inner darkness.

My growing ability to express my beliefs dimmed the fear in those around me. If my heart's compass swung towards fear I welcomed the reminder and consciously challenged my misguided perception.

I now constantly confirm my choice for love. Whenever I feel fear's magnetic pull, I welcome it as a reminder to switch on the light, knowing my ongoing choice governs my future and wellbeing. Understanding the fundamental choice between love and fear was paramount in successfully regaining my life. I know God is everything. I will not permit another's fear to deny my truth. My faith in God's love is my compass. It has guided me to reclaim my place in the world and my right to try to be a worthy expression of God.

© Shirley Lane (2005). *Shirley Lane attends the Church of England. Friends told her about WCTS.*

A WCTS - Friends Bulletin Connection!

The June issue of Friends Bulletin will be devoted to mysticism and spirituality, and will include as a bonus a sample issue of WCTS. If you would like to buy the June Friends Bulletin, or subscribe outright to Friends Bulletin, write Anthony Manousos, Editor, 3223 Danaha St., Torrance CA 90505. It costs \$3.95 for one issue, or \$12 for a seven-month trial subscription, June-December 2005 (\$35 until December 2006). Write Attention WCTS on the envelope.

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November 2005

God's Humor

Editor: **Judy Lumb**

Deep in worship have you found a chuckle of delight growing in you? Has an irony or paradox of faithfulness brought you to laughter? Has a message during prayer (or a coincidental event) amused and challenged you? Have you awoken from a dream laughing out loud? Has God helped you to laugh at your own folly and set you back with your burdens lightened? Please share your experiences of God's humor and remind us of the joy of being close to God.

Deadline: August 15, 2005

February 2006

Miscellany

Editor: **Patricia McBee**

We're not soliciting new material for the February issue, because we have accumulated a store of material waiting for a theme. This time the theme will evolve from the content. We will bring you an interesting miscellany of stories, poetry, and resources that attest to the presence of Spirit in our lives.

May 2006

Jesus

Editor: **Kathy Tapp**

I am the light that is above everything... Split the wood and I am there. Lift the stone and you will find me there. (Gospel of Thomas)
For the past generation, Friends have had an ambivalent relationship with our Christian heritage. Yet, sometimes unbidden, we have experienced Jesus' presence in our prayer life, in meeting for worship, or at a time of crisis. Tell us of times when Jesus has come to you and how that has touched your life.

Deadline: February 15, 2006

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