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# What Canst Thou Say?

**Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice**

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this: but what canst thou say?  
Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest,  
is it inwardly from God?*  
—George Fox

## Touched by the Spirit

### Seeing with New Eyes

Growing up I was acutely and painfully aware of how I didn't measure up, how some of my physical, intellectual, or emotional didn't match the cultural ideal. I would compare myself with others and rate myself as better or worse. A lot of my energy went into trying to attain perfection in order to feel esteemed and loved.

I would like to say that at 63, I am free of these judgments and attitudes. Certainly my emotional and spiritual maturation have helped release me from their crushing hold. However, even though intellectually I know that it is irrational, I sometimes still get "caught" in feelings of inadequacy or even shame about some aspect of my being and I try to cover up my blemishes.

And I perpetuate the problem by judging others. These appraisals can be either negative or positive. I have come to realize that judgments are separating no matter whether I am validating or criticizing myself or another person. When I judge, I am setting myself or someone else apart and creating a hierarchy of worthiness.

I practice and teach mindfulness meditation as a way to become aware of and work with the thoughts, judgments

and attitudes which close the heart. However, even with heightened awareness and insight, I never was able to grasp the concept that we are already perfect, just as we are. It didn't make sense to me. Even though I consciously tried to be non-judgmental, I still believed that we all have weaknesses which are our responsibility to improve. And I still would see these flaws in myself and others.

A few months ago, I finally "got it." I was facilitating a day of silence with my meditation students. As I looked at them at the beginning of the day, my usual categorizing came into play: I saw "heavy Alice," "sensitive Sue," "intelligent Carol," "critical Tom," "aging Harry," "negative

Beth," "pretty Lisa" and so on. I led the group in guided meditations for several hours.

At one point, I opened my eyes and a dramatic shift occurred. I didn't see individuals with particular attributes. Their spirits were shining through.

*I saw beings of light  
I saw how beautiful and perfect  
each one is,  
how we are all the same,  
how we are just fine as we are.*

That experience was life transforming for me; I hold it close to my heart. I understood in a very deep way how there is that God in every person. It doesn't mean I've been able to drop my strongly conditioned habit of judging but I have this awe inspiring visual

Judy Leshefka

#### *From the Editor:*

*This issue wasn't developed around a single topic, but is a collection of material that has accumulated in the files of WCTS. Each one tells of the Spirit's presence—in guiding through a time of fear, opening to new ways of experiencing the world, or providing a path—just as the Spirit does for each of us when we open ourselves to guidance.*

*On another note: The WCTS team awaits the Spirit's provision for the future of this newsletter. Periodically WCTS needs fresh energy in order to stay alive. This is one of those times. Please consider the need listed on page 3 and reflect on whether working with WCTS is an opening on your spiritual path.*

Patricia McBee  
Editor for this issue

## Silence Is The Holy Circle

Joyce Povolny

*Why do we run from the  
silence,  
The vast dome and the stars,  
The absolute still,  
Away, away, far from us?  
Why are we glad at the  
sound  
Of the lapping waters  
And the wind  
Whispering little nothings  
In the tree tops?  
Do we think that silence  
Is the same as a void,  
A void which when filled,  
Could shake us  
To our foundations?  
We know in our souls  
(The ultimate premonition, no  
doubt)  
That silence is the sacred  
circle  
In which God is the lone  
dancer,  
Inviting each one of us—  
Without exception—  
To be his partner  
And few of us, if any, have  
courage enough  
To say, "I will, my Lord,"  
And so stay His foot  
From stepping out the holy  
circle.*

**Joyce Povolny** has been a Quaker since 1958. She finds that Quakerism fits her soul and is the foundation from which her poetry comes to her.

memory to refer to when I catch myself being judgmental.

I have even begun to play with it, reflecting on William Shakespeare's quote: "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players." I think of myself and others as actors playing a role here on earth. I imagine that we each have taken on an assignment and assumed a certain physical form, with different emotional and mental capacities, and we then play out our role in different life experiences.

When I judge I then remind myself that what I am seeing is not the real essence of myself or another individual but merely one's physical manifestation. And when I am upset about someone else's particularly offensive behavior, I laugh and think, "Oh, you poor thing. You were so brave to take on the nasty person role." And then I remind myself of who we really are in spirit and I find compassion for myself and the other.

*Judy Leshefka is a 23 year member of La Jolla Monthly Meeting in San Diego. She teaches the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program and integrates mindfulness in working with her psychotherapy clients and in her personal Quaker practice.*

## Exploring the Nameless Mystery

Roswitha Jarman

*There is a something inside us, says Meister Eckhart, that I shall call a castle but it is neither this nor that. Nothing can get into it, not even God. It is without 'mode'. You cannot will anything into it; you cannot fill it with your intellect. God cannot get into it, because the concept God is already invested with images and words and form and so is no longer the pure and simple no-thing.*

Eckhart must have had experience of this ultimate presence; how else could he write so strongly about this mystery? When Eckhart talks of being *ledig* (virgin like) empty he talks of this empty place within us, the place where this gnostic knowing has its ground. In this place and out of this place of 'no-thing'—that is, the space within this castle, where there is no mode, no form or words—we know a presence. When the spark from this presence momentarily blinks into our reality, we know that for a moment we knew. Then we name it and clothe it, give

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<[http://www.geocities.com/what\\_canst\\_thou\\_say](http://www.geocities.com/what_canst_thou_say)>

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it form and shape, and it no longer is what it was.

The search for this knowing is at the heart of my reflections. How am I nurturing this space, how am I surrendering to it? How am I letting it flow into the shapes and forms of my life so that it is the transforming energy in my doings?

Meeting for worship is the journey through our sense perceptions and our mental images and thought processes to the edge of our being—the uncertainty of ‘no-thing’. The moments of going ‘over the edge’ are rare and in truth, we don’t know when it happens, because our empirical self is not present to measure it. Eckhart says the result of stepping over the edge is a recognizing God in all, of tasting God in all. Afterwards, everything tastes of God: the divine has been born in you.

How is this in my own life? When I sense myself standing on the edge, then my heart is filled with total compassion for all creation. I recognise the oneness of all, I am filled with patience, tolerance and gentleness. There is nothing sloppy or sentimental about this feeling, it is a feeling of total groundedness, a feeling of non-despair in the face of situations of despair. Out of this my actions become meaningful, not because of me, but because of the opening up to the transforming quality that passes all understanding and that is potentially present in all.

We Quakers often chide ourselves saying that we don’t know what we believe today, that we have not formulated some kind of creed that we can communicate to others. I feel good about this openness in one sense, because I know this is how it must be; you cannot name what has no name. But I also recognize that the personal journey of many Friends (and my own journey) often gets stuck in barren land, when we long for a named faith,

## Help Keep WCTS Alive: Database Help Urgently Needed

*As our faithful readers know, What Canst Thou Say? is a volunteer operation, a gift of love. After several years as our treasurer and subscription manager, Margaret Willits now feels called to other things. This behind-the-scenes role is essential to getting WCTS to our subscribers. We asked in the last issue and no one has responded. We will only be able to continue to publish WCTS if someone steps forward.*

*Each time in the past that an essential job came open, someone among our readers or their friends felt led to take up that piece of work for a time, allowing WCTS to continue.*

*The subscription manager task takes a few hours a month. It requires only basic database skills, but it does require a careful eye and attention to detail.*

*Might you be called to this work? For more information contact Mariellen Gilpin <m-gilpin@uiuc.edu>*

for forms, for images to hold on to.

I need to remind myself of edge experiences that have been given to me and have fed my knowing. I remember the first retreat for which I had responsibility in East Germany in the early eighties. I was very anxious about leading the retreat; would I have the

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*What matters is how we do our tasks—are we equipped to let the Spirit shoot through all our doings?*

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ability to make it a good experience? I had a co-facilitator from the local Quaker group, and we had sat face to face the evening before by candle-light on prayer stools in deep meditation and sharing.

On the first evening of the retreat, when I felt the weight of the responsibility within me, I suddenly heard within me quite clearly: *It is not you that is doing it.* A wonderful feeling of release followed. On the next day in worship I had an out-of-body experience. It became so clear to me that *body and soul are two different*

*things.* We have a spirit/soul that is independent of the body. On the third day I had perhaps the most meaningful experience. As I was sweeping the floor (we catered and cleaned for ourselves as part of the retreat) it was as if a brilliant light shot through me and into the broom and I knew *What matters is how we do our tasks—are we equipped to let the spirit shoot through all our doings?* These three moments of deep insight came totally unexpected. They certainly did not come through any brain or sensory activity, they suddenly were just there. I have not had such strong moments of knowing since then, but I have a hunch that we are given these moments sparingly; if we treasure them in their purity, they are enough for a lifetime.

I understand more and more clearly that it does not matter if we believe in a God or not, and it does not matter if we can explain with our empirical data about our faith or the phenomena of such experiences as I have described above. What matters is, has our engagement with the reality of life changed? Can we taste the Divine

in all? Are we filled with compassion for all creation in our doings? Do our doings contribute to transformation? Do they contribute to moments of uplifting joy? Can

we taste the Divine in all? Are we filled with compassion for all creation in our doings? Do our doings contribute to transformation? Do they contribute to moments of uplifting joy? Can we be part in a process of healing? Have we ourselves, and the people we are engaged with, experienced a sense of growing and expansion through our being together? Are we contributing to this our pained world in a way that raises the good?

## what is this echo?

Alison Lohans

*rippling in the depths  
where only the bravest  
may linger, casting nets  
in search of light*

*webbed filaments that  
for a time coalesce  
then drift, watery fronds  
oozing bubbled breath*

*faint flickers precede  
it anticipate pulse  
amplified a thousandfold  
in a radiant chorus*

*and the song goes on  
forever,  
touching every shore  
bathed in the word,  
divers bear witness*

**Alison Lohans** lives in Regina, Saskatchewan and is a member of Prairie Monthly Meeting of Canadian Yearly Meeting.

With this my present body and its capacities, I understand little about the totality of existence. I have no doubt, however, that there is a mystery which participates beneficially in life, if we make room for it. Our task is to make room for this mystery, to surrender to it, so that it can be a transforming part of life.

As I journey on, I take the knowing I have received with me and experience it in new forms. Martin Buber said, *If you want to speak with God, you must put your arms around the world*—embrace all, without distinction, to enter into the *I-Thou* relationship with all creation, both the good and the bad, and in so doing, open the way for transformation.

*Roswitha Jarman is a member of York Monthly Meeting in Britain. She is active with Alternatives to Violence Project, has been actively engaged with people of the former Soviet Union, and is a member of the Britain Yearly Meeting retreat group.*

## Spirit Birthing

Merry Stanford

Keeping my heart and soul open to the workings of the Spirit has taken exactly the kind of focus, courage and support as was required of me when I gave birth to my children. Both processes involved intense pain, and ended in an unmistakable sign of God's grace, giving great joy and hope.

When giving birth, I could not stop the process, though I did have some influence on how it went. I could slow it down, through my breathing practices—which was a very good thing in my case. I could even pretend things were not as they were—not such a good thing. With my second child, I pretended to myself that I wasn't as far along as I was, and so nearly arrived at the birthing place too late. But once the birthing process began, my babies did come. They had to come. I couldn't

stop them from coming. I ultimately had no control over when and how they came, and in what shape they arrived. I only had control over myself: how I breathed, how I relaxed, how I rested when I could, how I used or didn't use medication, how I connected with those who were helping me, how open I was to the experience of being inwardly transformed by this birth.

The same has been true in my own spiritual birthing process. My early life was a horror of violence and deception, and I survived it by hiding the memories away, deep in my unconscious mind. When a part of one's experience is buried, a part of one's self gets buried with it. I lived most of my life only half alive. As an adult, attempting to respond to the inward promptings of a healing Spirit, I was led to a loving, inviting, gentle God—who lived in the innocent depths of my soul. In order to travel there, I have had to travel through some difficult memories. I have had to be willing to see what is there to see, to feel what is there to feel, to re-experience, accompanied, that which nearly destroyed me in isolation. There has been no other way to learn that I never lost, could never have lost, God's love.

I have had to learn how to keep open when I would rather have shut down in fear, or shut out in rage. I have had to learn to “go with the flow” of this spiritual birthing, breathing in and breathing out, letting go and letting God when the chaos was beyond me, taking hold and bearing up under it when I had the strength to do so. And because I had children for whom I was emotionally and financially responsible, I had to learn to do this around their needs. At those times when I couldn't manage it alone, I learned to call on God and people to help—to do the laundry, change the diaper, go to the grocery store, drive my children to school, hold me while I shook, or even just get me up in the morning.

## Not My Own

Helen Weaver Horn

*I'm planting iris seed  
around our swimming pond.  
I crush each brittle pointed pod  
shared by a friend, shaking  
its bounty on the mud  
and fallen leaves along the bank.*

*I come upon deer tracks,  
and think how cloven hooves  
will press these jet black seeds  
deep into muck, embedding them  
for winter as the slime does  
quench their thirst.*

*I stand and bask in the reflection—  
gold and russet trees on quiet  
water.  
Deer will pause here just as I,  
raise up their noses, dripping,  
gaze, but always on alert,  
ears cocked and nostrils  
flared for scent of danger.*

*On the Palestinian West Bank  
the danger is a way of life.  
The soul who ventures out  
into the open, needing food or*

*medicine, may well be shot.  
Tanks rumble  
through the ravaged streets,  
their big guns sweeping.*

*Snipers, young recruits who  
follow  
orders, hide around the corners,  
wait. Our taxes arm them, help  
their bullets fly. What privilege  
have I to stand here gazing,  
walk along this sheltered bank  
to plant my flower seed?*

*This ground I cherish and invest  
my life in is no more my own  
than Hebron is Israeli  
if a Palestinian elder like myself  
can't walk into her orchard  
now at harvest time,*

*can't pause to catch her breath  
in peace and revel in the sheen  
of light on glossy leaves  
before she fills her basket  
with the rich black olives  
from her family's ancestral trees.*

**Helen Weaver Horn** is a member of Athens, Ohio, Meeting. She says of this poem "I have been grateful when the Spirit has helped me channel my lamentation about American foreign policy and the violence in the world not just into lobby action and street protest, but poems that bring the realities home in concrete ways."

I have had to be willing to experience all of myself—all my anger, loneliness, terror, despair—rather than to bury it in an inward tomb, or pretend it wasn't there. I had to be willing to work it like a pile of rotting compost, to dig it into the rich earth of my life. I found that I had to be willing to let others see the garbage, and discovered—to my great surprise—that there were many who responded in compassion and friendship. There have been several who watered that compost heap

with their own tears, who took a hand at helping to turn it, who even added a little of their own material to help balance the mix and get it "cooking"!

I have persistently judged myself very harshly for having such a messy life on my hands—I wanted to heal without any tears, without despair, without fear. I believed that if God were walking with me, there wouldn't be so much pain, that I would be uplifted by God's presence, that I would be able to transcend the suffering,

somehow smiling calmly through the storm that raged around me but didn't touch me.

It doesn't work that way in birthing children, nor do I think it works that way in spiritual birth. Pain touches us. It gets deep down into us and shakes us up, inside out, and all around. If we want to move forward, we have to find a way to breathe through it, to live with it. To open to it.

I don't think there is anything redemptive about pain. It is not beautiful, or holy, or a lesson that God sends us to refine our spirits. I don't think that suffering is necessary to our growth, nor that we have to suffer to know God. There are times when I find it absolutely blasphemous that the symbol of a whole faith is an instrument that was used to torture and kill, and that God has been blamed for willing the death! It is absolutely clear to me that God does not will suffering, nor cause it, nor control it.

And yet, in my life suffering has been transformative. It has also been, at times, harshly beautiful, in the way a winter field can be beautiful, clutched in the grips of a blizzard. It was suffering that catapulted me so resolutely toward God's healing presence. And there is a raw hope in me because a person called Jesus of Nazareth was able to be present to Love, even in the midst of an agonizing, humiliating death.

"Transcending" pain and suffering in the end is not something we can aim for, or use as a goal. It's not something we can accomplish through our effort. All we can really do is to stay open to the reality that we live in, a reality which includes plenty of suffering, and plenty of beauty.

It's through our open hearts that God creeps in, like a stowaway. It is our willingness to open that determines the kind of birth we will experience.

God's Seed really does take root in the compost formed by working the soil of our Being. That Seed is our hope, and it will be born. It cannot be stopped. We have only to keep working the soil, stay open, and wait for the birthing day.

*Merry Stanford is a member of Red Cedar Friends Meeting in Lansing, Michigan. She travels with the FGC Traveling Ministries Program to assist meetings in healing and deepening their experience of the divine.*

## God's Plan

*Linda Loftus*

I lost my job, in large part due to my hearing loss. I could see it coming as with each observation my supervisor would make a note such as, "Linda didn't hear what the student said," or "She didn't hear the student return from speech." I had to prove myself over and over again, but in the end a mutual agreement was reached. I was out of a job. My self-esteem and confidence in my teaching ability was at an all-time low.

I continually prayed to God to open a door. My desire was to give presentations around the state of Indiana about hearing loss. The door has not opened yet. My husband and I needed my salary so I applied to substitute teach. I restricted myself to Special Education classrooms because I wanted to make sure I had an assistant in the classrooms to help me hear. I needed to see if I could be successful as a teacher again. I was nervous the first few times I was called to substitute, but it didn't take long to see that I loved substituting. I was getting compliments on my abilities and ideas that I shared. I also was not responsible. I came in to the classroom in the morning and there would be lesson plans and the assistants would be very helpful. I was called to substitute almost every day once school started.

I was enjoying substituting so much I had decided that is what I would do for this year. Then I received a call to substitute for a week in a high school classroom with students who had moderate to severe disabilities. Little did I know when I entered the classroom that the teacher had been fired a few weeks prior and that there had been a parade of substitutes in the classroom since. The assistants were doing the best they could managing the classroom and developing lesson plans.

The first morning, the Special Education Director came and asked if I wanted the job. I was hesitant for three reasons: I was still unsure of my abilities to take over a classroom again. I enjoyed substituting and not being responsible. I had not worked with high school students in several years and did not know if I could communicate with them effectively. I told the Director to come back at the end of the week and I would let her know then.

The Special Education staff and my assistants constantly reinforced me in saying that I was doing a good job. They bolstered my self-esteem and belief in myself and my ability to teach again. The assistants were providing materials but we often were short of things to do and I had to start adding to what the assistants had given me for the day. Wednesday of that week, one of my students got in trouble during lunch. He told the staff member, "It didn't make any difference because we only had subs anyway." That struck a chord in me. I realized how much they needed stability and someone who cared. God was speaking to me through these students.

During the course of the week, I started caring very much for these students. Many

of the students had come from broken homes or worse. I saw that I could make a difference. By the time Friday came I knew what my answer would be. I have not regretted accepting this teaching position.

If someone had told me that I could again feel successful and confident about my teaching abilities, I would not have believed them. I have opened up to the students and they have responded in kind. I have one student who often tells me, "You are an awesome teacher, Mrs. Loftus." It is an incredible feeling. I have been there to comfort and challenge. The students know how much I care, and in return they have given me their love tenfold.

I thank God every day for this teaching job. I had prayed so long for direction and guidance. God has blessed me in His plan for me in ways I never thought possible.

*Linda Loftus is a member of the First Presbyterian Church in Elkhart, IN. She now teaches deaf and hard of hearing students and gives presentations and educates others on hearing loss.*



*Alison Randall*

## A Sense of Peace

Shelley Kirilenko

When my husband Andrei and I moved to Washington DC in 1996, I had a clear vision for my life. I would be a stay-at-home mother and fiction writer. Six years later, at the age of 40, after undergoing various fertility treatments, I was still not pregnant. Nor had I had much success as a fiction writer. I had gotten a few short stories published, but my novel was being rejected left and right.

In the summer of 2001, a couple months after my 40th birthday, I found myself in the throes of a crisis. What was the purpose of my existence? It no longer seemed clear to me. I was at the halfway point in my life and had nothing substantial to show for it: no children, no career, no job. I began to question everything, even my marriage.

In that summer of 2001, my husband had a conference in Switzerland, and invited me to come along. One afternoon, while Andrei was attending a meeting, I took a walk through the village we were staying in. As I reached the end of the main road, I came across a small church at the top of a hill. I had never been a religious person—both my parents are athe-

ist—but on that day I walked up the stairs and into the church.

The church was very plain and had an earthy smell. Most importantly, it was empty, aside from some wooden benches, a pulpit and a few hymnals. I took a seat somewhere in the middle of the church, closed my eyes, and bowed my head. “I’ve never thought of asking you before, God, but I’m asking you now. What do I need to do?”

I decided I would stay in that church until I got an answer. I sat in silence with my eyes closed. For a long time, nothing happened. I was aware of cars passing on the narrow street below, and of my own breathing. At some point, the silence changed, and I was aware of another presence both within and without myself. I can’t say whether I heard, saw or simply felt the answer to my plea. All I know is that I was overcome by an immense sense of peace, and knew exactly what I needed to do.

After we got back from Switzerland, I underwent one more cycle of *in vitro* fertilization. Both Andrei and I agreed that this would be my last. The embryologist said my eggs were of extremely poor quality, and it was highly unlikely that this cycle—or any cycle—would work. Miraculously, one egg not only fertilized but formed

a perfect 8-cell embryo. Nine months later our beautiful, perfect son was born. I am now a happy and grateful stay-at-home mother who still hasn’t published her novel. Somehow, I know that I will.

*Shelley Kirilenko, is an attendee of Bethesda Friends Meeting in Bethesda, Maryland. Led by the Spirit, she recently completed a memoir on her experiences with infertility and in-vitro fertilization.*

## Honey from the Sky

Charleen Krueger

About a year before my father died, I began to have experiences that spoke to my condition. As I was walking on a sunny sidewalk, doing last minute errands prior to flying across the country to see my father, perhaps for the last time, I was stopped mid-stride. A feeling of absolute serenity poured over me like honey from the sky. My arms opened to my sides; my face turned upward, my eyes closed, and I smiled—all of it as involuntary as being jolted to my feet by ministry in meeting. This happened in an airport as I worried if I would make to his side in time and again as I sat quietly with him during his last week of life on earth.

A second kind of experience after my father died was seeing a dark shadow-person shape from the corner of my eye and feeling a presence. No one frightening, just an unannounced visitor. I do not have the feeling this is my father, nor have I received any teaching or messages. There is just someone there, observing.

Now there is a new experience—when I am walking and being still inside, sometimes I walk through a liquid sheet of light. It comes to me, not I to it. Suddenly I am on the other side. Once there were shadow figures there—a tall dark standing shape seen from the side and a kneeling red one,

### Instructions for Authors

*We welcome submissions of articles of 350-1500 words and artwork—line drawings or artwork suitable for black and white reproduction—that illustrate the theme of an issue, or that we might retain for use in future issues. Please send your text submissions in Word or generic text format and artwork in high resolution jpeg files. Photocopied art and typed submissions are also accepted. Send via email to <m-gilpin@uiuc.edu> or diskette, or hard copy to **WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820.***

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seen from the back. The tall one is solicitous of the kneeling one, a teacher with a pupil. But usually, there is only light and softness and peace.

There has been a concurrent gift with these experiences—acceptance without puzzlement or distress.

*Charleen Krueger is a member of Claremont, California, Meeting. She reports that her main spiritual interest is incorporating spiritual practice into daily life.*

## Two Messages

Sally Campbell

Usually when the Spirit speaks to me it is with nudges or hints, but twice in my life I've actually heard very clear words within myself that I knew were not my own but from That-Which-I-Meet-in-the-Silence. The first time was in July 1982 and the second in October 2001. Though the first one threw me into the emergency room (literally), by the time the second one came I'd become quite used to hearing from my Friend.

The two messages work together to give me all I really need to know as I face the details and decisions of my life. The first was *All is for Joy* and the second was *Work with Me*. Seven words, none longer than four letters. They seem to be designed to make it easy for me to understand and remember them even when perplexed and confused. I am very glad to have them and to share them.

I have already written for WCTS about getting the message "All is for Joy" when I was at the FGC Gathering in 1982. One night, at that Gathering, I declared to God "I will be faithful to you my whole life as I am to my husband" (who was back at home). Immediately I began what I described as "walking in the Light." Whatever I needed was right there, the person I wished to see was coming towards

me. It was astonishing. I also began writing songs.

My exalted state lasted until the end of the Gathering, but as I returned home I was getting more and more weird to people around me (and to myself as I look back). Whatever I received I was interpreting it as a message, even Yes on a detergent bottle. I was also to completely simplify my life, which including taking off things like my shoes and wedding ring. My husband became alarmed and eventually, when I refused to take blue pills that my therapist recommended and had disrobed in our apartment, he had the police come and take me to the emergency room.

While I was there I began going around and around a circle in my mind and counting each turn. The top was all beauty, color and light, the bottom dark and fearful. As I went around I began to understand they were both part of a whole. One was not a punishment and all was one benign reality. (A phrase I'd learned from Re-evaluation Counseling but this made it real.)

I returned to therapy, which I'd left that spring, and told this story over and over. Sometimes it seemed like a manic episode and I was put on lithium for a long time, but especially just before going to Gatherings. When I spoke to a spiritual friend at the next Gathering, he suggested that what I had done was to try to hold onto the experience too hard. If such a thing happened again I was just to allow it to happen. It was like if you try to hold onto a rope that is moving too fast, you can get rope burn. I myself felt that what some folks might see as a breakdown was also a breakthrough.

The second time The Voice broke through to me was after almost twenty years of learning how to listen in and out of meeting, and doing my best to follow the Dear One. About a month after 9/11, I was walking in a poor district of New Haven, going from the train station to the Catholic Worker where my car was parked. Like everyone, I was traumatized by the attack on the trade towers, though I was not personally close to anyone injured by their fall. I was just walking along noticing the small lawns and houses and was looking at one very ordinary tree when I heard the words: Work with Me.



Judy Lumb

The Loving Creator of this tree and all other trees and the whole universe wanted me to join in the design and maintenance of a creation where all is for joy. You can see just by looking at it how well a tree is made: it is beautiful, life giving and fits with all the rest of the natural world. This time the message, though truly wonderful, fit so well with all I'd been learning that I accepted it as just another miraculous message to encourage and enlighten me on my path.

*Sally Campbell is a member of Morningside Meeting in New York City, a singer-songwriter, and personal organizer.*

# Resources

## Book Review

*The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth.* Gerald G. May, M.D., Harper San Francisco, 2004.

The dark night, which is not necessarily a time of suffering and despair, but rather one of deep transition during which our lives are clouded and full of mystery. We move through trial and uncertainty to freedom and joy. Our liberation takes place mysteriously, in secret, and beyond our conscious control. Dr. May draws on the teachings of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, on other spiritual traditions, on psychiatric ideas and resources, and on poetry and literature.

Perhaps the most helpful chapter is May's treatment of John's "three spirits who may visit people in the night." These spirits are most likely to appear in response to a sense of continued dryness in prayer. Troublesome they may be, but they come from God: the first spirit is that of fornication; wanting to get a satisfying experience from prayer rather than the love that prompted the prayer in the first place. The spirit of blasphemy—the impulse to rage against God—follows as a natural response to finding no satisfaction anywhere. As Teresa said to God after one particularly bad experience, "If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few of them!"

The third spirit is Spiritus Vertiginus—the dizzy spirit—for people who refuse to relinquish the idea that "if only I could understand, I could make it right." Sooner or later, there is nothing left to do but give up, and that is precisely the point; reliance upon God deepens; profound peace, joy, and the fullness of love of God, others, and the world result.

May provides some guidance for helpers accompanying people experiencing the dark night. In his final chapter he helps define what living in God looks like: "Actions and feelings flow from a bottomless source within us, and our intellect can do nothing but stand back and marvel...free from our own ego agendas, true compassion will arise directly and spontaneously within us." (Teresa said her longest experience lasted less than half an hour.)

Reviewed by Mariellen Gilpin

## Bogert Fund Grants

The Elizabeth Ann Bogert Memorial Fund for the Study or Practice of Christian Mysticism, administered by Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas, makes annual grants of up to \$1000.

Grant applications should be no more than two pages and include a statement of the applicant's working definition of mysticism, a description

of the project, the specific amount requested, the way in which a grant will be used, other sources of funding, and plans for communicating the results to others. Deadline for proposals is March 1, 2006.

For more information contact Vinton and Michelina Deming at [muccidem@verizon.net](mailto:muccidem@verizon.net).

***Nurturing, Sharing and Inviting the Mystical Experience: A retreat at Woolman Hill retreat center, Deerfield, MA, April 21-23, 2006.***

Participants in this retreat will gather in the company of others, historical and contemporary, to share experiences of God's transcendence and immanence. Cosponsored by the New England Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel and led by Susan Davies and Tom Antonik of NEYM.

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**May 2006**

## **Jesus**

**Editor: Kathy Tapp and Mariellen**

**Gilpin** *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 times of crisis. Tell us about times when Jesus has come to you, and how that has touched your life.

Deadline: February 15, 2006

**August 2006**

## **Grace**

**Editor: Mariellen Gilpin**

Grace is a flow of energy and blessing, utterly unearned and freely given. Sometimes Grace may be given to deal with a challenge in ways beyond our usual repertoire of emotional reactions. How has Grace touched you, either in the moment or for a lifetime? Have you been enabled to make a Grace-filled response? How were you lifted out of yourself into a new way? What has been the outcome? How has your experience of Grace changed you?

Deadline: May 15, 2006

**November 2006**

## **Evil**

**Editor: Judy Lumb**

Tell us your experience of evil. How did you recognize it? How did you respond? How have you come to regard it since? Was it somehow deserving of compassion? Where was God in that experience? How has it changed you spiritually? What have you learned? How do you prepare yourself to face the evil in the world? How do you deal with the evil within?

Deadline: August 15, 2006

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