



February 2008
Number 57

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

Called

Faith to Follow: Nothing to Fear

Viv Hawkins

Peace I ask of thee, oh river.
Peace, peace, peace.
When I learn to live serenely,
cares will cease.
From the hills I gather courage,
visions of the day to be,
Strength to lead and faith to follow
—all are given unto me.

I reluctantly attended a “lamentations group” at my meeting where I opened my heart to the pain of the world, allowed it to stream through me, and offered it up to God. The words that spilled from me on my knees, the only posture from which I felt able to say these things, went like this, “God of Abraham, Son of David, have mercy on us for not having the faith to know we have nothing to fear.”

For two years now, I have passionately sought “faith to follow.” I was 50 when I became single for the second time in my adult life; I felt a wide solitude—both freeing and bereft. A few months later, I left my job after 30 years of diverse professional service; in so doing, I shed the ability to draw self-esteem from income, a title, or work that offered me stability and meaning. I reduced my possessions to those which fit in a friend’s Prius (with both of us in it) so I could no longer define myself by my possessions. I gave up my apartment and accepted another friend’s generous offer of hospitality; with that, I sloughed off a sense of self-sufficiency and came to know the power of mutual relations

over transactions. I telephoned family and friends and wrote to those with whom I wished to make peace. I was on my way to India. I had a sense I might not return.

A year earlier, members of a Pendle Hill “Discerning Our Calls” class had found me clear to go to India. A prayer from my journal at that time asks,

“Am I willing to be re-formed, to be made anew, to die in order to live more fully? That is the question I face now. And my answer needs to be, YES! But how? How to let go of the fear involved in letting go?”

In my bones, I knew the truth in the statement of a spiritual friend who suggested that I was not going to India

to “do” something but to “be done to.” This pilgrimage has called up every fear I know and sent me spinning more times than I can count. Sometimes, I have felt like a kayaker capsized and bouncing off the many boulders hidden beneath the white water. Teilhard de Chardin wrote, “We can set no limits to the uprooting which is part and parcel of our journey to God.”

My meeting’s minute of travel for that first India trip quoted me saying,

“I ready myself to freefall into God’s arms... As I release material possessions, power positions, and aspects of human life which some believe offer security such as home, income, and plans for the future, I experience this as a further

From the Editor:

The writers in this issue illustrate some of the many ways we may feel called by God: an inward voice, an urge, the encouragement of a friend, even a state of being. They have found themselves called to things big—give away nearly all that you have and travel to a far part of the globe; and relatively subtle—be more lovingly present. They share their sense of unworthiness and their awareness of how the sense of call may be distorted by their own desires. And they share that following a leading doesn’t necessarily mean that the path will be smooth or that there won’t be doubt or resistance.

I hope that you will find in these stories something that resonates with your own story, and, perhaps, something that helps you to hear more clearly and more courageously surrender to God’s gentle and persistent call.

Patricia McBee
Editor for this issue

move into the Mystery... Even as I feel God's enfolding, I await God's unfolding for me."

I had no idea what awaited me.

As I prepared for this I needed to learn to float down stream, feet first, and try not to clutch at the water.

One of my primary destinations was Varanasi, a city along the Ganges reputed by Hindus to be an auspicious place to die. From a respectfully distant ghat, I watched open-air cremations release the deceased's spirit and the ashes surrendered to the holy waters of the Ganges. By that quietly flowing river soon after dawn, I released my father who had been cremated by a far different process in a distant land long ago when I was 3 years old. And, a part of my spirit was freed. Throughout those three months in India, the ground of my being as I knew it, me, would be partially removed and replaced with something much firmer, a growing faith in God.

Only now, more than a year later, can I see the kenosis, the being emptied, which God perceived beginning in me. I was available in a much different sense. I was available the way a clean-swept apartment is available to its new tenant. God was moving in sometimes at my invitation and sometimes despite my attempts at eviction.

I have never...been "stricken on the road to Damascus" as was Paul and had my way clearly dictated to me from the heavens... In perspective I should say in all humility that my life has been characterized by an inadequate, persistent effort to try to find a workable harmony between religious profession and daily practice. —Clarence Pickett, 1966

Thanks to dear companions with whom I share mutual accountability to faithfulness, more and more we return to God—the original meaning of "repent." And, in gratitude for what I have received, I tenderly place my hands under the heads of people reticent to float in the Divine as they reluctantly lay their backs on the water and turn their hearts to the sky.

By faithfully following, in so far as I have, I touch the hem of the Infinite and glimpse the Eternal. A part of me had no idea this is what would be revealed. Another part of me knew irrevocably this belovedness of God is my inheritance as much as it is everyone's who thirsts for it.

God who is within, around, and beyond us all, thank You for the faith to follow so that we may know in our heart of hearts we have nothing to fear.

Viv Hawkins is a member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting.

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, Richard Himmer, Chris Johns, Joan Johnston, Judy Lumb, Patricia McBee, Grayce Mesner, Eleanor Warnock and Wayne Yarnall.

Please write for WCTS! Instructions to authors are on page 8. Send editorial correspondence to <mariellen.gilpin@gmail.com> or WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820. See the WCTS website for a history of WCTS and updated queries for future issues: <whatcanstthousay.org>

Subscriptions are \$10 for one year, \$18 for two years. Back issues are \$1.50 each, \$15 for a partial set (Issue 1-20, 21-40), and \$40 for a complete set up to the current issue. Email subscriptions are \$5 per year. Subscription correspondence should be directed to Richard Himmer <info@whatcanstthousay.org> WCTS, 1035 Hereford Drive, Blue Bell PA 19422-1925.

Please write for permission before reprinting excerpts.

Calls

James Baker

About every twenty years it seems I change my career. I can feel signs that I'm on the verge of beginning a new one. Long ago I started monitoring my energy, enthusiasm, initiative. When my daily joy consistently flags I heed the message and go inside to commune with my Self—querying. If I'm patient enough and quiet enough God speaks to me—through an inner nudge, a good friend's comment, an unexpected opportunity. I listen to my dreams' messages.

I'd spent half my life working with things—industry and business—but, finding my joy at creating what I'd considered sculptures reduced by others to the level of devices, I began massage as a hobby. This, my first response to my query, began what would change my life for the better.

At a conference one of the speakers said, "If you're interested in massage, you should see this old doctor, who is the best in the world." I pestered him for four years, then was accepted. At the end of his training he told me that if I wanted to know more about his work, I should become a physician too.

I was fifty years old. I'd been out of university for 25 years. I sought inside again and felt the quiet urge to try. Yet I hesitated. Again, God spoke through another person, an acquaintance: "If you don't do this, you'll always be sorry you hadn't."

I went. It was hard. I went to a strange land—the United States. I wrote myself Haiku poems—really Queries, which called forth inner encouragement. I persevered, in the process, eventually as a faculty member, making many new friends—professional colleagues. I discovered and made dear Friends too.

Now all the technical things I have done can be used in my new life, with patients, with health care students, and in health research. My joy became so pervasive that I would wake and go to work early—even at five or three in the morning, or even on the weekends. My heart sang.

I was blessed in the way Teilhard de Chardin speaks of—in the words of the message hanging on my wall—when

My joy became so pervasive that I would wake and go to work early—even at five or three in the morning, or even on the weekends. My heart sang.

he wrote, “Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.” It was the most enjoyable 25 years of my life. Until I retired, heard a new call, and now help my three littlest grandchildren (two girls seven and nine, and a boy twelve) begin to discover their own life paths.

I am greatly blessed.

James Baker is a Friend away from his beloved Downers Grove, Illinois, Friends Meeting. He is writing a book about chiropractic healing experiences that he collected over 20 years of practice.

Editor Mariellen Gilpin interviewed on “Keepin’ the Faith” November 25, 2007 You can listen to it at: <will.uiuc.edu/am/ktf>

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

Mariellen Gilpin, Editor
Retail \$15.34, 172 pages

Get your copy from:
<authorhouse.com>
1-888-280-7715

Taking Up and Laying Down the Burden

Barbara Clearbridge

I am called to laying-on-of-hands healing. At first it was in a medical context, doing “Energy Work” treatment. Then spiritual healing manifested itself also. I now have the joy and mission—and responsibility—to let divine energies work through my hands. I use a combination of Energy Work and prayer. I love my work and the mysteries it brings.

I began this work in 1986. After a while, there were enough clients that I made it my full-time work. I work totally by love offering. This is actually very practical—the first month I tried it, my income tripled. For every person who could pay little or nothing, there was another who paid far more than I could charge in good conscience. But how peculiar, how awful, to make a living only when people were

ill! So I began teaching people how to do energy work for themselves and their families. Much better! But then there were lulls, times when I wasn’t making enough money. Bills piled up. The stress was hard to handle.

I had a terrible choice: if I took other work, I wouldn’t have the time or energy to help everyone who asked me for healing. How could I turn down helping the sick? But I had to live.

This choice has come to me several times over the years. I have had to take part-time jobs. But each time I do, I suddenly have oodles of clients asking me for healing. It is always abundantly clear that I’m still called to this work. I have to quit the new job in a few months. Then eventually — sometimes quite soon and sometimes many years later — the work slacks off again.

I pray, “God, if you want me to do this work, you have to provide enough money for me to live by it. Otherwise, let me take a different job in peace! Don’t send me people when I don’t have time

to help! I’m willing to do the work, or not, whatever You wish.” This doesn’t work.

Three times in one year I had a dream where someone called my name: “Barbara! Barbara!” Waking, I thought of Samuel in the Bible and answered, “Yes? I’m here, I’m listening.” Nothing more was said. “This isn’t helpful!” I protested the second time, and the third time. “What are you trying to tell me?” Silence.

If we lived in a small, tribal culture, I’d work all day at some trade and occasionally someone would need healing and the whole village would gather and we’d do it together. This seems sane and right. I would still be called to healing, but the need would not be greater than I

could manage. I would not have to choose between making a living and helping others, or between helping this person or that person. In our present culture,

I sometimes feel I’ve been called to something that is impossible to provide. Yet I’m grateful for the privilege of helping anyone at all.

I’m considering other ways to live, such as continual house-sitting, so I don’t need to make so much money. But everyone needs a home somewhere, especially as we age. I’m 55 already. If only there were Quaker convents.

Now, once again, I’m interviewing for part-time jobs. If I don’t get one, I’ll have to look for something full-time. I pray once more, “God, I’m willing, I’m willing to do whatever, wherever. You have given me the gift of healing. Help me to fulfill it, or help me to know that my responsibility to use it has ended. Show me the way.”

Barbara Clearbridge (who usually goes by the nickname “shulamith eagle”), attends Lake Forest Meeting in Illinois.

The Call

Patricia A. Williams

Dear God, You've made a mistake. I've thought a lot about it, and now I'm going to write about it, to see it in front of me, on paper. I got your message okay. That's not the problem. The problem is, I'm the wrong person. Your message must have been meant for someone else.

I admit the time was right—my favorite day of the church year, Maundy Thursday, when the institution of my beloved Eucharist is celebrated. And the place was right, too—church immediately after the celebration, the altar stripped, the lights dimmed, holy silence. And the vision.

There is no mistaking the vision, a mental vision, of course, not one a camera could capture, but a vision nonetheless. It was a vision of me as a bride, a very classical '50s bride, long dress, white veil, and all.

I did not like the symbol even then. Marriage is not my thing, not to mention being a classical '50s bride. Yet the use of a bride as symbol is one reason I don't think my own mind made up the message. My mind would have chosen a symbol I liked.

Anyway the message is clear. It is a call to what the medieval mystics knew as the unitive life, a life fully united to yours. The medieval writers used the symbol of marriage to talk about it.

Swept up as I was at the time, in that spiritual atmosphere and state of prayer, I said "yes! yes!" joyously. Suddenly the Spirit of altar and Eucharist, who has always seemed exterior, seemed interior. Your familiar presence appeared inside me. At the time, I was enormously grateful. However, in the cool light of day, I know something is wrong. I'm not worthy of such a thing. There must have been a mistake. The message was meant

for someone else, someone far better than I, a saint somewhere. The heavenly bureaucracy got the address wrong.

Look, I'm hardly even religious. I teach in a secular university. I'm a philosopher of science. I believe in reason and evidence. I defend science against faith, evolution against creationism, and naturalized ethics against the Bible. I don't think the Bible is authoritative. Christianity might be the wrong religion. I've not believed it to be the right religion since I was in eighth grade.

Moreover I am a skeptic. I am perfectly willing to admit that God might not exist, that all religious experience might be mere fantasy, including my own. I don't believe half the things

the churches teach, any churches, mine included. I have remained an Episcopalian while I have been a Christian, a theist, an agnostic, and an atheist. Yes, an atheist. I was an atheist for four or five years—that's years, not minutes.

Furthermore I drink, I cuss, and I have had a dozen lovers. I've broken most of the Ten Commandments more than once. I admit I have not born false witness. Nor am I covetous. Nor have I murdered anyone, but I have certainly wanted to.

Dear God, there has been a mistake. People like me are not called to unity with you. We will never sit among the saints. We can only hope to slip unnoticed some foggy night through a crack in the heavenly portals.

Writing like this and rereading seems helpful. If necessary, I will try again.

Patricia A. Williams is the author of the autobiographical pamphlet, Hazardous Engagement: God Makes a Friend, from which this passage is taken. The pamphlet is available, free, at universalistfriends.org. She is the author of several books, among them Quakerism: A Theology for Our Time. See her Web site <www.theologyauthor.com>.

What a Bunch of Schlubs!

Eric Evans

One of the great consolations of the Bible for me is that it often reads as a litany of the incompetent, of idiots, liars, cheats and thieves. Real jerks. And these were the people God chose, that he called out of suffering, stupidity and sin? As far as I can tell, God seems to make use of us because of our frailties and woundedness, not in spite of them.

When I was eighteen, I turned my back on my evangelical-fundamentalist upbringing and marched boldly (or so I thought) into The World.

Six messy years later, finding myself alone and terrified on the eve of heart surgery, I remembered that I still knew how to pray. And as I prayed, what came to me was a profound sense of peace, of comfort, of being held and loved. It felt as if I could just lie back into God and float away.

I've continued to sense God's presence with me through the years—even when I have trouble "finding" Him, a knowing still seems to remain that God is with me. As I've found my way into Quakerism, after a few roadside stops and detours along the way, I have struggled with exactly how God wants me to be faithful. I think that for a while there I was struggling under the illusion that God would somehow appear at the horizon as a trumpet-toting angel, proclaiming, "GO TO JERUSALEM!" I'm beginning to realize that God tends to speak to me in much quieter tones. And then my ability to hear the Spirit is further muffled by my own "stuff"—my ego, my overactive thoughts, my own self-will.

For a while now I've felt God calling me to wait on Him; to be a better listener; to hold my meeting in prayer; to be open and to love, love, love my meeting and the many people in my life. These two are some of the hardest—every once in a while I look around in meeting for worship and think, "What a bunch of schlubs—and these are the people God's

calling me to?” Very recently I went to a weekend FGC consultation—I arrived filled with frustration and exhaustion towards my meeting and filled with intense self-doubt. During worship on the second night, I felt a shift—a deep wave of compassion rolled over me regarding

And as I prayed, what came to me was a profound sense of peace, of comfort, of being held and loved. It felt as if I could just lie back into God and float away.

my meeting and myself, and a sense of patience for all of it. What I came to was, “One of the real insults of Quakerism is that I have to sit down every week and listen for God with people who are just as imperfect and faithless as I am!”

This is the real deal—to go into it with no illusions, no expectation of perfection, and to know that this is the particular portion of the Family of God that I’ve been called to serve in some small way.

A few months ago I was asked to serve as an elder to a young Friend traveling in the ministry. This came as an honor and a terrifying opportunity—what if I really made a mess of things? I’m pretty aware of my own deficiencies, and knew there were an infinite number of ways I could screw up. So I went back to the one thing I knew how to do—I prayed, and tried my best to be open. I prayed like my head was on fire for this Friend and her traveling companion, and that the Spirit might help me to hear and say what I was meant to. I knew I couldn’t do this in my own wisdom—it was pretty much, “Lord, I am an idiot; help thou mine stupidity...” Maybe this is the big lesson God’s calling me to learn—to recognize that yes, I don’t have it all together, but that if I’m open to God He can work transformation in me and others.

Lately I sense that God is leading me toward being more intentional about

nurturing the gifts He’s given me to carry for the time being. I’m struggling with the sense that God might be asking me to ask for help from my meeting in a larger way than I have been—what a scary thought this is for me. (And back to this thing of trusting my meeting, this body of Friends who are as human and flawed as I am!)

If you were to ask how God was calling me, I’d have to say very, very softly. And if you were to ask me what I think God might be calling me to, I’d have to say it was to trust more, love more, listen more, and be willing and available.

Eric Evans worships and shares God’s gifts with Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, where he is a member.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Ambivalence and Resistance to God

Mary Kay Glazer

I believe I have known God’s call in my life, and more than once. I also know that I may be wrong about what God is calling me to and what I think God’s call sounds like. I try to discern God’s will in muddied waters littered with the clutter and clanks, the noise and distractions of a life lived not nearly as faithfully as I would like. My sticky need and clutter include:

- A craving for people’s approval
- A distrust of my own motives
- An inconsistent prayer life
- A sense of self damaged by a childhood in an alcoholic home
- A craving to do the right thing, to be a ‘good girl’
- A craving to be noticed and rewarded for doing the right thing
- A frequent sense of the (seemingly) tenuous tether that keeps me connected to God

And there is more, so much more. It is a wonder, really, that I can presume to claim to know God’s will ever.

I have come to see that God calls me in unexpected ways. Perhaps the most unexpected is that God seems to call me by actively using my resistance. One example is how I came to be in the School of the Spirit’s program, “On Being a Spiritual Nurturer.” When I applied, I was clear about attending the program if accepted. When I received the acceptance letter, not only was I unclear, but I felt a wall of reluctance to even let family and friends know that I had been accepted. I finally said yes to the program, after a discernment process with my husband and close spiritual friends, and after discerning no stops to moving forward. But I was deeply ambivalent. At some point along the way, however, I began to be aware of God’s presence and activity in my ambivalence and resistance.

Gradually, I began to understand that the ambivalence and resistance were part of the call, part of how God was using me, part of how God was teaching me. In that experience, and others in which resistance played a big role, I began to see that resistance serves a divine purpose—or at least it can. I began to see my resistance as part of the testing process. I also see it as part of an authentic relationship with God. And as part of how I understand God’s call.

Regardless of the clarity—or lack of it—when it seems God is calling me forth, I am aware of the importance of ongoing spiritual supports in my life that help make discernment possible. These include my spiritual director, a small spiritual nurture group with three others where I can test God’s call and recognize God’s presence; regular times of prayer, in whatever forms are available to me (and whatever forms I am not resisting at the moment!); Quaker meeting for worship; and more.

The temptation of busyness has been a piece that I have had to work through. In our mainstream culture, to be busy is to be important. This seems to also be true in Quaker culture. The busier one is with spiritual things, the assumption is, the more spiritual one is. I have been given the eyes to see that this is a lie.

The connection between busyness and holiness taps into my pride. It has been a rich spiritual lesson to try to discern and respond to God's call in the shadows; and to say no to things that would be good to do—but whose attraction is primarily an uplifting of my ego and probably not God's call.

I am learning anew what discernment means. And it means, I think, letting go of my craving to make sure something happens; and letting go of my sometimes obsessive need to make sure I do it right. It also means, I think, coming to a deeper understanding of my relation-

[Discernment] means ... letting go of my craving to make sure something happens; and letting go of my sometimes obsessive need to make sure I do it right.

ship with God, and what God seems to be asking of me. It means letting go of my desire to control what happens. It means letting go of my need for results.

So ultimately, I think, it doesn't matter if I discern God's call and follow it perfectly. In fact, it is pretty clear that I won't be perfect (and I think God intends it that way). I think what God calls us to is to simply be in love with God, to simply be in relationship, and to live out of that loving relationship in all that we do as best we can—and that means to live with humility, kindness and tender care of ourselves and one another.

Mary Kay Glazer lives in the Adirondacks in northern New York, where she attends the Ticonderoga Worship Group and Middlebury, VT, Monthly Meeting. She is a spiritual director and leads Couple Enrichment retreats with her husband.



Saying Yes, while Living into the Calling

Maurine Pyle

I had been meditating in the evening, as was my custom, when suddenly a vision overcame me. I found myself kneeling with the women at the foot of the cross. There were the three Marys, the daughters of Rachel, weeping over their lost child. Slowly I lifted my eyes expecting to see the broken, dying body of Jesus, the symbol of my Catholic childhood. Instead I witnessed a bright light, more luminous and encompassing than anything I had ever experienced. In that single moment my heart was transformed by the great love of Jesus. I feel that I was given a momentary glimpse of the Divine in full glory. I knew that Jesus was indeed the Christ. All my doubts ceased. For the first time, in that moment of pure ecstasy, I became a Christian.

Not long after the vision occurred, I heard the Voice speaking to me again, this time with an insistent and clear message: "Record your ministry." I did not understand what the message meant, and for a long time I ignored it. As far as I knew, under Quaker practice everyone has the ability and responsibility to minister. When the Voice would not relent, I turned to my elder Allie Walton for clarification. She explained to me that the recording of ministry was an ancient practice which had been laid down by most Friends meetings. In earlier times it had been the way for Friends to acknowledge and recognize special spiritual gifts, particularly those of public ministers. Recording offered a process for holding ministers accountable by providing elders to support and guide them in their work.

Notwithstanding the historical precedent, she took my leading seriously and insisted on forming a clearness committee to consider it with other elders from Lake Forest Friends Meeting. After we met for careful consideration of my concern, the committee agreed that I should first present my leading to the meeting.

I felt that I had no choice but to follow their direction, and even though I was scared, I was committed. I knew that the meeting would have to struggle with my request.

The process of hearing my leading engaged the entire community for over a year (1984). I endured criticism, intense questioning and even a few direct attacks. My request had apparently reopened the wounds of those who had rejected Jesus—"the victims of Christian malpractice" as Dan Seeger has called them. In the latter part of the 20th century, Quaker communities have attracted renegades from many faiths who were wounded or disappointed by their childhood faith communities. Many of them are Christians. These people who heard me witnessing for Jesus, while at the same time making a claim to a vocation in ministry, were deeply unhappy. For a while I was definitely *persona non grata*. I asked God repeatedly to release me from this painful duty, but the message I received was "Accept this time of sacrifice and you will be rewarded later."

One experience particularly stands out in my memory. The business meeting had called a threshing session to give the entire community an opportunity to focus on my leading. As I scanned the room, I noted that a psychologist was present. My first thought was that he had been asked to check the sanity of a woman who hears voices. Mystics can be easily psychologized these days. This was a tense occasion for me. I wanted nothing more than to hide away and never see these people again.

And yet there were times of acceptance of this cross I carried, accompanied by a deep peace. I told them the story of the guidance to record my ministry. It wasn't hard because I had already related it to many people in the room before. There was silence and then someone responded. It was a young Evangelical Quaker who chanced to be visiting us that day. I never forgot his words. He said, "If we feel Maurine's calling is genuine, we should write it on our hearts, affirm it with our lips, and rejoice with her." I wept, moved by his words. To

this day I believe he was an angel sent to comfort and encourage me.

A few weeks later the clerk approached me to say that the business meeting could not reach a sense of the meeting regarding my request. I told her that I felt the recording had already taken place since I had done as St. Paul advised, “I will announce your name to my brothers. I will sing your praise in the midst of the assembly. I will put my trust in him” (Hebrews 2: 12-13). After all, recording of ministry was simply meant to be an acknowledgment of the call by placing one’s ministry under the care and guidance of the meeting. I had accomplished recording my ministry. The next step would be to find spiritual guides. That process has taken many years because we have all needed to learn how to guide one another. I still walk this path, less lonely, less afraid. The calling has been proven as genuinely from God. Doubts may still linger, yet my ministry is recorded on the hearts of many.

Maurine Pyle identifies herself as “the Quaker Hobo.” Hobos differentiate themselves as travelers who are homeless and willing to do work, whereas a “tramp” travels but will not work and a “bum” does neither. (From Wikipedia)

~~~~~

## On Being Called

Elizabeth De Sa

A few years ago I was praying under a tree. Although young, it had an aged wisdom beyond my years. It was a time of inner turmoil for me, and I sought the consolation of this tree often. I watched bulbous green fruits growing on its slender branches, until one day one dropped in front of me. I had no doubt—the fruit was a gift. Slowly I picked it up, smelled it and ran my tongue over the silky, minutely hairy skin. A thin white milk exuded from its crown. My eyes caressed its gentle curves. I had no idea if it was edible but I decided to trust the spirit in which it was given. I peeled it slowly, savoring its silent grip loosening as skin separated from fruity flesh. I ate what was proffered, black-maroon

flesh riddled with fine white seeds, luxuriously, juice tantalizing my lips. Its sweetness, its deep earthy flavor fed the bubbling energy at my core, the rising of which thrills me as it surges through my body—I feel most alive when I am connected with the Divine in all.

It was my first mindful eating experience, a glimpse into a constant state of divine being. I wasn’t thinking about being mindful; it happened naturally when I was in a state of divine listening. The fig was a gift of love from sun, earth, and tree. It fed my body and soul.

A few months later, I left my life in Australia for a year of spiritual exploration at Pendle Hill. The two years prior had been filled with angst about not fitting into society, and seeking deep spiritual satiation for a hunger that was consuming every moment.

---

*There is much joy in following a calling.*

---

There is much joy in following a calling. I also felt relief to be free from earth-quaking depressions as my soul called for outer alignment with its innermost workings. But I did not grow complacent. Having experienced the Divine in nature, my soul yearned for divine communion in all—I aspired to be guided, to follow paths that led me to deeper connectedness. But it takes time to understand the human condition, the divine mission, my gifts and callings. They were revealed as I was ready.

At Pendle Hill, I explored contemplative prayer, meditation, mysticism, arts, Quaker testimonies and activism. I then took a position teaching Environmental Science at a Quaker high school semester program on peace, social justice and environmental sustainability. I passionately developed a curriculum exploring the science of the environment, environmental use, abuse, anthropocentrism, and spiritual ecology. I was passionate about the material and I cared a great deal about the earth, my students and how to live joyously and

sustainably on this planet. Yet that was not enough.

The depression did not return but the angst did. I grew negative in my perceptions and I felt cheated. I was assigning papers that I wanted to write; I was tired and did not have enough energy or time to connect with the Divine, and I was tired of talking about sustainability—I wanted to practice it. Through meditation, I saw that my perception was clouded by callings that were not being followed. Having been gifted with divine experiences, I seek to reside constantly in that place of deep connectedness. My deepest wish for life is to attain inner peace.

Similar to my decision to go to Pendle Hill, I again decided to turn contemplative: not just for a year, but as an answer to my soul’s calling, as a way of life. Since I was 5 years old, I have wanted to be a writer. I feel alive when I am writing, it is the medium through which I perceive and inspire. Yet it is a gift I have often ignored; for too long I have only valued things I find challenging or cannot do, and tried to push myself into teaching jobs that “stretch myself.” This time I decided to accept myself instead. I cut my hours, took a salary cut—from \$20,000 to \$2,000 per year—and became the gardening intern. By following inward callings rather than outward expectations, characteristics that had been limitations became gifts—I allowed myself to soar and my Light to shine.

I am infinitely happy in my new role. I begin at sunrise with meditation, then a long writing session before moving out to the garden. As I water the plants, I become aware of the water I drink filling me with the prayer I pour into it. As I gather and eat fresh kale, I am filled with awe and gratitude. I have a relationship with plants through all their life stages. I am a nurturer and facilitator of their growth; they are equally so in mine, a symbiotic relationship of love and need. At university I studied Biology objectively. Yet here in my garden, as I build my compost, and feel its heat surrounding me as I turn it, I feel a part

of life, death and rebirth. Eating is now an inherently mindful practice.

I'm experiencing a newfound parallel between my working life and my spiritual life. The land teaches me the harmonious and natural principles of cooperation. I aspire to speak the language of enough rather than excessive desire. There is a synchronicity here with my need for simplicity, of connecting with the Divine in nature, and learning from the wisdom of the wilderness. The spirit that is alive and heaving in all of creation surrounds me. I listen and learn through intuition. I play with plant spirits and they guide me in nurturing a beautiful garden beyond my knowledge and experience.

In this time of food insecurity—when agribusinesses destroy more than they grow, when petroleum-based farming paves the way to war, when corporations control seeds and plant genomes, gardening is a political and spiritual move. And writing is my prayer of authenticity.

I am blessed with learning, time, quiet to hear God's voice, solitude, community, abundant life energy, stimuli for inspiration and growth, and unfolding inner peace.

*Elizabeth De Sa is a Young Adult Friend of Indian descent raised in the UK. She attends Grass Valley Meeting in California. Her daily spiritual practices are meditation, contemplative prayer and writing.*

## Called on the Day of My Conception

Erin McDougall

I was called into the world by God on the day of my conception. Like every child, I was born with a Divine spark shining within me, not yet honed nor dampened by worldly learning and experience.

A little more than twelve years later, I began to define this presence that I had previously left unacknowledged. After some discernment with my dear grandmother, I identified myself as a part of my religious heritage and determined that I was, like my mother before me, a Friend.

---

***God has been in every moment of my life, not just present when I am shaken to the bone by the magnitude of what I am called to do.***

---

It wasn't until two weeks after my thirteenth birthday that I heard the call again. It was more audible this time and required my complete attention. Something deep in my body, a place of knowing beyond any place I had been aware of before that moment, spoke softly to me as my world turned upside down.

As doctors told me that I had cancer, God assured me that this was part of my journey. This was the beginning of my work.

My belief is that the "seal of Divinity" (as William Penn called it) is placed on us the moment we come into being. We are born into the world understanding the sanctity of our Self deep within our souls, embedded in our muscular tissue and skeletal structure. Unfortunately, almost immediately we begin the process of forgetting.

We spend the rest of our lives re-learning what it means to be a child of God and a member of this earth-family. The process of hearing and responding to our calling in life is part of this re-learning. As we begin to re-learn who we are as people, especially in relationship to others, our ability to be present to our relationship with God grows.

In a perfect world, this is the moment in time when we would all claim our true selves, step into our own skin with joy and confidence, and embody the original calling that we heard when we came into being in this world.

This is not a perfect world.

For years after finishing my chemotherapy treatments, I was completely lost. The devil, in this case, had many forms, but ultimately was anything that would take me further off the road that I glimpsed briefly when I was first diagnosed.

As I journeyed back from that dark place, I began to find pieces of my true self again. The first traceable step in the reclaiming of my life's purpose came when I left behind everything I knew to delve into five months at Pendle Hill. The call to go to Pendle Hill came in the night, jolted me out of a deep sleep and had me repeating the call into the empty air around me. It was not a question of having heard God right, nor a question if I should follow. So, hardly knowing where Philadelphia was on a map, and having never lived outside of Canada, I got on a plane less than a month later to begin this new chapter of my life.

The call to Earlham School of Religion came in a similarly startling

### Tell Us Your Stories!

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

All authors and artists retain copyright to their articles and artwork published in **WCTS**. **WCTS** retains the right to publish initially and also to reprint in **WCTS** anthologies. If you want to reprint an article from **WCTS**, please contact us for permission.

form, leaving me shaking and weeping in the middle of a class during my time at Pendle Hill. I found many excuses for why this was not going to happen but when each dilemma that might keep me from this work was miraculously solved, I could no longer avoid God's nudging.

I have been offered many opportunities to work through the fear to live into God's will. One such opportunity came with a leading to travel in the ministry last summer together with Friend Andrew Esser-Haines.

As is true of any travel in the ministry, we quickly found that the reasons that we thought we were at gatherings were not, in fact, the reasons that God had brought us to that place. God used us in numerous ways, some of which we are slowly identifying and some that we will never know.

Perhaps the greatest thing I have been blessed with is the deep knowledge that God is in everything. God has been in every moment of my life, not just present when I am shaken to the bone by the magnitude of what I am called to do.

I was called into this world by God on the day of my conception, as we all are. Each step of my journey is a small piece of a much larger calling: to see God manifested in everything and to fully live into the Self I was meant to be. Everything else is merely details.

*Erin McDougall was born and raised in Vancouver, Canada. She is currently a student at Earlham School of Religion, completing a Masters of Divinity with an emphasis in Pastoral Care and Counseling. One of the things that brings her joy is to create glass art using broken windows and other media.*

~~~~~

Limits to the Leadings of the Light

Hugh Barbour

Quaker historian, Hugh Barbour, has shared with us his pamphlet *LIMITS TO THE LEADINGS OF THE LIGHT*, a "Weed Lecture" given at Beacon Hill Friends House in 1993 and published in 2006.

What Canst Thou Say?

After surveying various interpretations of leadings and sources in early Quaker writings, he notes three major limits:

A. We are limited by our era and our culture.

B. We are also limited by pride, self-will, and the ambiguity of the ego. Quakers worse than others go on to equate our own desires with God's leadings.... I have spent many hours trying to pass decisions over to God, when the buck should have stopped with me.

C. Quakers are called to be perfect. Our efforts to transcend our limits may be our worst limit of all. We cannot sin as boldly as Martin Luther, yet we are called to be absolutely obedient to even our relative light.

Quaker tradition gives us two further insights: If we live by the Light we have, more Light will be given.... Secondly, our trust in God...does rest on our experience of God working in each other. God meets us in other people...to teach us what God has taught them. The anchors to our faith may include Jesus and other religious leaders, but also what the Spirit of God has done around us despite our own limits.

Hugh Barbour was Professor of Religion at Earlham College and the Earlham School of Religion from 1953 to 1991. He now lives in Sleepy Hollow, NY.

Announcements

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

Proposals and references for 2008 grants are due by March 1, 2008. For more information contact Vinton and Michelina Deming, 4818 Warrington Avenue, Philadelphia PA 19143 or at muccidem@verizon.net.

The *What Canst Thou Say?* team is grateful for a 2006 grant from the Elizabeth Ann Bogert Memorial Fund that allowed us to publish *Discovering God As Companion: Real Life Stories from What Canst Thou Say?*

From WCTS contributor Fred LaMotte: I teach in a college distance learning program and almost all my students are in Iraq. I have developed a website of soldier's writings on faith issues to give our men and women in Iraq a human face, "Soldiers Speak: Wrestling with the Angel of Faith In Iraq." I hope that teachers and ministers will use these writings by soldiers in their classes and ministries. These are not my writings, but theirs. Please check out their words and experiences at <http://FaithintheZone.blogspot.com>

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

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

Enclosed is my check to What Canst Thou Say?

_____ \$ 10 for a one-year subscription _____ \$18 for two years

_____ \$ 5 for a one-year electronic subscription

_____ \$ 40 for a complete set of back issues to the most current

_____ \$ 15 for partial sets (Volumes 1 - 20 or 21 - 40)

_____ \$ 1.50 for individual past issues

Enclosed is a contribution of \$ _____

I cannot afford \$10, enclosed is \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Please write for *What Canst Thou Say?*

(See instructions for authors on page 8)



May 2008

Transforming Conflict

**Guest Editor: Pam Melick
with Mariellen Gilpin**

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you (Matthew 5:44). When have you attempted to answer conflict with love? What prepared you to respond this way? What did the Spirit ask of you during this conflict? How did you respond? How did the other person respond to you? What transformations did you experience?

Deadline: February 15, 2008

August 2008

Telepathy

**Guest Editor: Maurine Pyle with
Mariellen Gilpin**

Sometimes we hear our friends' thoughts before they speak, or see something happening thousands of miles away. Maybe we feel it in the pit of our stomachs, or dream it, or simply know. What has been your experience of telepathy? Was the experience helpful? Did knowing help you respond in a better way than you might have otherwise? Do you do anything to foster telepathic experiences? How has your experience of telepathy affected your spiritual life? How has your spiritual life affected your experience of telepathy?

Deadline: May 15, 2008

November 2008

Angels

**Guest Editor: Michael
Resman with Judy Lumb**

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. (Luke 2:9) When have you encountered an angel? Was it a comforting experience, a disturbing one, a summons to labor in the Lord's vineyard? Angels might be described as agents of God's mercy. Have you been helped by an angel? Have you been an angel helping someone else? How have angels changed your life? Share your stories of angels.

Deadline: August 15, 2008

What Canst Thou Say?

WCTS c/o Richard Himmer
1035 Hereford Drive
Blue Bell PA 19422-1925

Address Service Requested



Called