

A Mystic Call . . . Naming the Spiritual Condition of the World

Proceedings of The Second Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics



**Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana
June 6 – 10, 2014**

2nd Edition
with additional material and minor corrections

Janice Stensrude, Editor

A Publication of *What Canst Thou Say?*

2015

Many thanks to Betsy Meyer, Janet Mullen, and Janice Stensrude
for contributing photographs

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Back: Jennifer Elam, Lissa Field, Marie Vandenkark, Mike Resman, Jan Mullen, Roshan Dinshah, Lois Dinshah, Mark McGinnis,
Betsy Meyer, Deb Moyer, Stuart Greene, Mike Moyer, Wayne Swanger, Earl Smith, Paulette Meier
Front: Diann Herzog, Virginia Swain, Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson, Judy Lumb, Janice Stensrude, Marcelle Martin, Jan Goodman, Jeff Brotemarkle

I see a call to “mystics” as no different than a call for a gathering of birdwatchers—everyone can watch birds, but not everyone is all that interested in it. — Janet Mullen

The Epistle

Greetings to Friends everywhere from the participants in “A Mystic Call: The Second Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics, Naming the Spiritual Condition of the World” organized by What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS), which is a Quaker journal, a meeting for worship in print.

During our first annual gathering in June of 2013, a leading arose to “Name the Spiritual Condition of the World.” Over the course of the year by blog and email, we discerned that before we could name the spiritual condition of the world, we had to name our own spiritual condition.

Just as at the first gathering, we met at Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana. We were housed in student housing and the College furnished meals and meeting rooms. It was a homecoming for some participants who had attended Earlham in earlier years. The first two days repeated the structure of the first gathering, sharing our stories. Each included worship, small group worship-sharing, and an ongoing art exhibit. The gathering served us by providing a safe space to share our mystical experiences, which some felt was not always comfortable in their home meetings.

There were no plenaries, committee meetings, or Meetings for Worship for Business. But instead we focused on sharing our stories. Meeting each other has built relationships among mystics coast to coast and brought old friends together.

Participants were invited to create Interest Groups. Topics included: Meeting for Healing, Refiner’s Fire, Dreams and Such, Tai Chi and Qi Gong, and Why I Live in Belize and Other Stories of Healing.

A highlight of the gathering was an Open Mic night that featured original poetry, stories, and singing. Toward the end of the evening, as a performer began her healing dance, music was spontaneously added, and everyone got up and danced.

We worshiped with Clear Creek Monthly Meeting at the Stout Memorial Meetinghouse on campus. Following lunch we said “good-bye” to the few participants who did not stay for the extended worship, and those remaining gathered to begin the work of naming our spiritual condition.

It was Pentecost Sunday afternoon, and we met in the second-floor Coate Library, which we christened “The Upper Room.” Over the next two days in extended worship and worship-sharing, one by one we spoke from the silence. As one participant summed it up, “I went to this meeting of mystics who don’t want to be called ‘mystics,’ who want to do something, but they don’t know what that is, and they want to do it again next year.”



Mills Hall, Earlham College



Table of Contents

The Epistle.	5
Schedule.	9
In Attendance.	12
Art Fair.	15
Home Groups.	17
Interest Groups.	18
Open Mic.	20
“Haiku Recital”	20
“My Neurotic Inner Self”	20
Marie Vandebark “Leading a Singalong”.	20
Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson “A Reading”.	21
Jeff Brotemarkle “A Dance with Mystery”.	21
Jan Goodman “Holy Horizon!”	22
Tom Fairfield “It Worked for Tom Sawyer”.	23
Paulette Meier “A Musical Performance”.	24
Virginia Swain “A Call to Wholeness”.	25
Wayne Swanger “Poetry Recital”	26
Betsy Meyer “My Date with the Devil”	27
Janice Stensrude “A Way Forward”	30
Jennifer Elam “A Shared Dance”.	33
Earl Smith “The Power of the Spirit”.	34
Mike Resman “Nonviolent Communication”	34
Stuart Greene “A Concern About Words”.	35
Marie Vandebark “Guides on the Way”.	35
Sunday Morning Worship with Clear Creek Meeting.	38
Extended Worship: Naming Our Spiritual Condition.	39
In Our Own Words: Sharing the Experience.	44

Table of Contents (continued)

Lois Dinshah “Mystic Tools”.....	44
Thomas Fairbank “Sinking Deeper into the Spirit”.....	47
Lissa Field “Learning About Myself”.....	47
Marcelle Martin “Precious New Friendships”.....	47
Mark McGinnis “Sharing Dreams”.....	48
Janet Mullen “Finding the Depth of Experience”.....	48
Janice Stensrude “Walk Cheerfully”.....	49
Wayne Swanger “Replenishing a Nearly Empty Well”.....	52
Appendix: Are You a Mystic?.....	55
Introduction.....	57
Wayne Swanger “Queries Regarding the Term Mystic”.....	59
What Canst Thou Say Yahoo Group “Are You a Mystic? An Internet Discussion”.....	61
Mariellen Gilpin “Lessons in Listening: What is a Mystic?”.....	73
Janice Stensrude “The Making of a Mystic”.....	75
Jennifer Elam “Reflections on Mysticism and Mystical Experience”... ..	91

**A Mystic Call . . . Naming the Spiritual Condition of the World:
The Second Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics
June 6 – 10, 2014**



Deb and Mike Moyer arrive at the Registration Desk in Mills Hall, where all participants are housed. An Earlham student volunteer (in maroon shirt) hands out room keys and gives directions.

Schedule

Friday, June 6

- Ongoing Art Fair
- 3:00 – 5:00 Registration and settle in rooms
- 5:00 – 6:00 Supper
- 6:30 – 7:00 Welcome, Overview & Introductions
- 7:00 – 8:00 Worship
- 8:00 – 9:00 Home Groups: *What are you hoping for here?*

Saturday, June 7

- Ongoing Art Fair
- 6:30 – 7:30 Early morning worship (inside and outside options)
- 7:00 – 8:00 Breakfast

- 8:45 – 9:00 Overview of day
- 9:00 – 10:00 Worship
- 10:15 – 11:45 Home Groups — Share your joys and frustrations in your spiritual life:
What is in your way in your spiritual life? How do you see yourself moving beyond your personal obstacles?"
- 12:00 – 1:00 Lunch
- 1:30 – 3:00 Interest Groups Session 1
- 3:15 – 4:45 Interest Groups Session 2
- 5:00 – 6:00 Supper
- 7:00 Open Mic Night — poems, songs, stories or interpretive dances. *Has a spiritual experience transformed your life? What have been your reflections on that experience? How does your spiritual life enter into your interpersonal relationships?*

Sunday, June 8

- Ongoing Art Fair
- 6:30 – 7:30 Early morning worship
- 7:00 – 8:00 Breakfast
- 8:30 – 9:30 Home Groups — *What have you learned/gained? What do you want to follow up with? What will you do when you get home?*
- 10:00 – 11:00 Worship with Clear Creek Friends Meeting
- 11:30 – 12:00 Wrap up — large group
- 12:00 – 1:00 Lunch
- 1:30 – 2:00 Large group gathering / Overview & set tone
- 2:00 – 5:00 Extended worship in meetinghouse
- 5:00 – 6:00 Supper
- 7:00 Singing, walking meditation, snacks & stories

Monday, June 9

- 6:30 – 7:30 Early morning worship
- 7:00 – 8:00 Breakfast
- 8:45 – 9:00 Overview of day
- 9:00 – 10:00 Worship
- 10:15 – 11:45 Small group worship sharing
- 12:00 – 1:00 Lunch
- 2:00 – 3:00 Worship
- 3:15 – 4:45 Large group worship sharing
- 5:00 – 6:00 Supper
- 7:00 Singing

Tuesday, June 10

6:30 – 7:30 Early morning worship

7:00 – 8:00 Breakfast

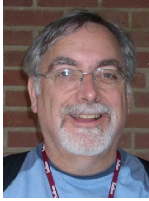
8:45 – 9:00 Overview of day

9:00 – 10:00 Worship

10:15 – 11:30 Wrap-up session: Large group worship sharing

12:00 – 1:00 Lunch

In Attendance



Jeff Brotemarkle
Columbia, Missouri



Lissa Field
Appleton, Wisconsin



Muriel Dimock
Red Wing, Minnesota



Jan Goodman
Columbia, Missouri



Lois Dinshah
Malaga, New Jersey



Stuart Greene
Lisbon, Maryland



Roshan Dinshah
Malaga, New Jersey



Diann Herzog
Anderson, Indiana



Jennifer Elam
Media, Pennsylvania



Anne Hutchinson
Oxford, Ohio



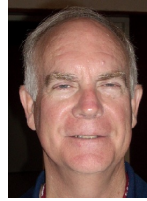
Tom Fairbank
Glen Ellyn, Illinois



Laura Lewis-Barr
Glen Ellyn, Illinois



Judy Lumb
Caye Caulker, Belize



Mike Moyer
Oskaloosa, Iowa



Marcelle Martin
Richmond, Indiana



Janet Mullen
Downers Grove,
Illinois



Mark McGinnis
South Elgin, Illinois



Rhonda
Pfaltzgraff-Carlson
Cincinnati, Ohio



Paulette Meier
Cincinnati, Ohio



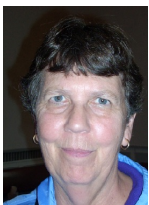
Mike Resman
Rochester,
Minnesota



Elizabeth "Betsy" Meyer
Silver Spring, Maryland



Earl Smith
Barnesville, Ohio



Deb Moyer
Oskaloosa, Iowa



Janice Stensrude
Parker, Colorado



Virginia Swain
Worcester, Massachusetts



Marie Vandebark
Eau Claire, Wisconsin



Wayne Swanger
Clarion, Pennsylvania

Art Fair

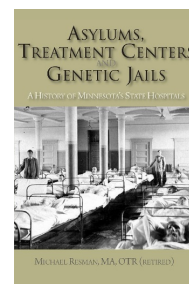
This year's Art Fair was held in a classroom across the hall from our main gathering room, where we gathered for introductions, group worship, and Open Mic Night. This was the year for literary displays.

Mike Resman offered for sale three titles that he has authored.

Asylums, Treatment Centers and Genetic Jails

The Mailmen of Elmwood

The Villagers

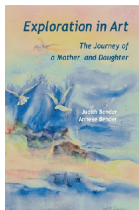


Judy Lumb displayed books published by her company, Producciones de la Hamaca, and took orders for new releases and backlist titles.



In Transit: The Story of a Journey by Sadie Vernon

Discovering God as Companion edited by Mariellen Gilpin



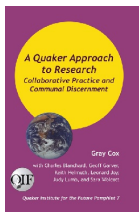
Exploration in Art: The Journey of a Mother and Daughter by Judith Bender and Anneke Bender



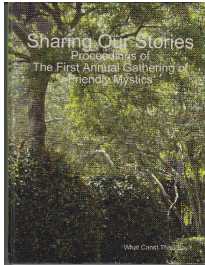
Ending Cycles of Violence II: Kenyan Quaker Peacemaking Response to 2007 and 2013 Elections by Kathy Ossman, Joe Ossman, Judy Lumb, and David Zarembka

Quaker Institute for the Future Pamphlet Series

- 1: *Fueling our Future*
- 2: *How on Earth Do We Live Now?*
- 3: *Genetically Modified Crops*
- 4: *How Societal Transformation Happens*
- 5: *Understanding the Growth Dilemma*
- 6: *Beyond the Growth Dilemma*
- 7: *A Quaker Approach to Research.*

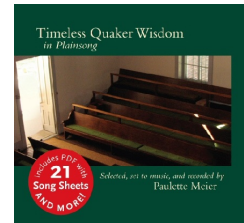
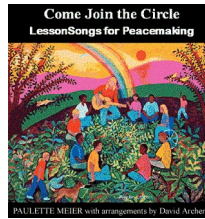


Virginia Swain offered for sale copies of her autobiography, *Mantle of Roses: A Woman's Journey Home to Peace*.



Janice Stensrude displayed the full-color hardcover edition and the black-and-white paperback edition of *Sharing Our Stories: Proceedings of the First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics*. Copies may be purchased online at Lulu.com. (Search for “What Canst Thou Say.”)

Paulette Meier displayed and offered for sale CD recordings of her music.



Home Groups



Wayne Swanger, Marcelle Martin, Diann Herzog, and Janice Stensrude, members of Home Group 2, met in a lounge area of Landrum Bolling Center. Fifth member Muriel Dimock was photographer.

Home Groups are small discussion groups that offer an opportunity to have a continuing relationship with a few of the others in attendance. During the first large-group meeting after supper and worship on Friday night, all attenders received their first Home Group assignments by counting off. These groups met once a day on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday to get acquainted and discuss topics of common interest. To help the discussions along, there was a suggested topic for each meeting. Topics for the first and last meetings focused on individual experiences of the Gathering—the first being “What are you hoping for here?” and the last being “What have you learned/gained? What do you want to follow up with? What will you do when you get home?” The second meeting invited participants to reflect on their spiritual journeys: “What is in your way in your spiritual life? How do you see yourself moving beyond your personal obstacles?”

Interest Groups

Interest Groups were formed as they had been at the First Annual Gathering. Some group leaders had planned their topics in advance of the Gathering; others chose their topics serendipitously from a thought of the moment or by request from others.

First Session

Calm the Rhetoric – Stuart Greene

Tom Fairbanks, who attended Stuart's Interest Group, offered this summary:

It was a discussion of politics, Quakers, and leadings. We shared stories of dialogue with those who differ in political perspective from ourselves.

Meeting for Healing – Jan Mullen

Jan wrote:

We set it up that people could ask to be held in the Light by the group, could ask for people to put hands-on, or not, as they prayed for them. It was a good size group, maybe a dozen or so. Several people asked to be put in the group's care. It was a profound experience; it was spontaneous and felt deeply caring and led.

Dreams and Such – Wayne Swanger

Wayne wrote:

Rather impulsively I signed up to lead a Special Interest Group, "Dreams and Such." I thought it would be interesting to hear others tell of their experiences that may have led them to a gathering of mystics. It was well attended with approximately seven or eight of us. During the time allotted we shared experiences that we had had that seemed extraordinary for one reason or another. Experiences included those that may have foretold the future, those that may have bridged the worlds of the living and recently deceased, and those that may have been more open to psychological interpretations. We may have strayed from the original intent of the group, but I believe everyone found the discussion interesting.

Second Session

Listening to God's Leadings vs. Earning a Living in a Capitalist, Individualized World – Paulette Meier

Following is Paulette's description in advance of the group's convening:

I'm thinking about how the fear of loss of income without any societal safety nets can prevent openness to leadings. Also about working class people who have so few opportunities to use their true gifts in an industrialized, collapsing capitalist society. What hopeful approach can be shared? What experiences can you share of mystical experience opening doors or avenues towards changing individual's lives or institutions?

Outside Gathering: Talking, Walking, Tai Chi . . . ? – Laura Lewis-Barr

Laura wrote:

Three of us did some QiGong outside. It was lovely. Then we took a walk around the cemetery. Our desire was to enjoy the outdoors.

The Refiner's Fire – Marcelle Martin

Marcelle was one of the Interest Group leaders recruited by attenders wanting to know more about a subject that they were known to have studied. She said, "We looked at some passages written by early Friends about how they experienced being refined by the fire of God's penetrating Light."

Why I Live in Belize and Other Stories of Healing – Judy Lumb

Some who missed this interest group last year, when Judy first presented it, asked for a repeat. The following is her account of the topic:

I was asked to do an interest group on why I live in Belize by someone who didn't know the answer, but wanted to know. I agreed and called it, "Why I Live in Belize and Other Stories of Healing." I told about how I got chronic fatigue syndrome at age 42 and had to retire early. After getting my sons through high school, I went to Belize for a couple of months total rest, thinking I would get well and go back to resume my active life. That didn't happen, but I learned to live an interesting life within my limitations based upon desktop publishing from my hammock. That got me involved in projects involving two of Belize's indigenous groups. I told of what led up to my miraculous healing at an indigenous ceremony after I had been in Belize for eleven years (and sick for more than thirteen years).

Open Mic

Saturday Evening, June 7

Seventeen participants made presentations. WCTS co-editor Judy Lumb connected WCTS co-editor Mariellen Gilpin with the event via Smartphone. Mariellen was recovering from recent surgery and sorely missed by all who knew her. The following contributions are listed in the order in which they were performed. (The editor apologizes for not having recorded the names of the first two presenters.)

Presenter's name not recorded – Haiku Recital

“I’ve changed my mind so often that I don’t want it to go on record.”

tell us the story

tell us enough

but not too much

the story is now done

Presenter's name not recorded – My Neurotic Inner Self

Marie Vandenberg – Leading a Singalong

Marie chose “Take These Hands,” by Patricia McKernon, from the *Worship in Song* book. “The more you sing it, the more it becomes a prayer,” said Marie, and we all sang, raising our voices in group prayer.

Chorus:

Take these hands, turn them into light beams;

Take these feet, turn them into your shoes.

Take this life, make it everything it might be;

Give me courage walking in the dark,

Oh help me choose a lighted path.

May my back be the wings of a dove,

May my knees learn to bend,

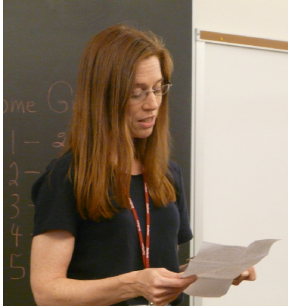
May my heart know the depth of your love,

And may that love never end.

Chorus

May my ears take pleasure in silence,
 May my mind learn to feel,
 May my eyes come to recognize
 The shape and the contour of the real.

Chorus



Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson – A Reading

Rhonda shared a few paragraphs of spontaneous prose.

Jeff Brotemarkle – A Dance with Mystery

A haiku, by David Foley, deceased, former resident of my home town, Columbia, Missouri: “I asked mystery to inform me. She said, ‘no,’ but asked me to dance.”

Before I knew David he was a chiropractor in Moberly, Missouri. One day he was celebrating the good news that he had managed to put his skin cancer into remission through various healing arts that he knew. He was riding his bicycle without a helmet, and he fell off the bike and landed on his head. Another hospitalization followed. For several months, his brother watched by his bedside frequently. David is a sort of New Age preacher type; his brother is a conservative Christian policeman. Later when David thanked his brother for standing watch during his illness for many nights, his brother responded gruffly, “Well, somebody had to do it.” David of course loved his brother, and likewise his brother, him.



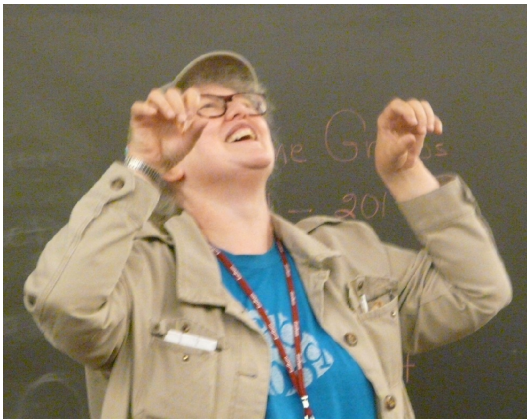
After his head injury, David was the secular chaplain of Paquin Tower, which is one of the places for public housing in Columbia. Secular chaplain is a term David coined. He said there is a job description, or office, even if unpaid, of chaplain, even if it is not a sacred office; he said the office of chaplain can be generalized to the secular world. David did not believe in using God language, but he functioned as the chaplain of

Paquin Tower. After his head injury, he functioned for years in what he described as a Zen state of the moment. He could converse well, but would frequently remark during conversations that he was not likely to even remember the conversation the next day. And it was true. He was so intelligent and conversed so well that many times, when people would mention something he had said the day before, they did not believe him when he said he could not remember saying it, even though he had told them that he likely wouldn't.

David died after about a decade of service as the secular chaplain of Paquin Tower. His skin cancer had eventually returned and that's what he died of.

I quoted this haiku from David because of the numerous disabled professional caregivers in the audience during that workshop. So many present were mystified by the question of why God would disable them, frustrating their desire to help others through their helping-related career, forcing them into retirement. I hoped the haiku would point the way forward through a dance with Mystery.

Jan Goodman – Holy Horizon!



When I was in school in the 1960s, we were expected to participate in the President's Physical Fitness Program (or whatever the name of it was.) People who could pass the tests got a large embroidered patch. One of the tests was called the Flex Arm Hang. (It was a substitute for the male-only Pull Up.) I could not do this. Then I went to US Coast Guard boot camp in 1982. The same test was expected. I went up to the bar expecting to fail and be kicked out of the military, for either that or some other physical failing. I grabbed the bar and suddenly was able to pull up and hang. Over the bar, I saw a beautiful shoreline with evergreen trees. I was so entranced that I forgot I was hanging there. As the vision disappeared, I could hear people telling me I had passed the test. I found this strange and inexplicable. But something stranger was to happen about a year later. I was in a boat and saw the same shoreline in person—real trees, not a vision. I found that very strange also. I have not had anything like this happen before or since.

Tom Fairfield – It Worked for Tom Sawyer

I never thought I'd be praying to God, desperate, on my knees, to help me paint a fence. This all happened a few years ago when I was in Wyoming doing youth ministry. The goal was for high school kids to be out there on the reservation and have this amazing spiritual experience where they meet Native Americans, listen to their stories, and give these people the gift of an acceptable paint job. And actually some of these kids did have that experience . . . these, of course, would be the kids who did not have to paint the fence.

You see, during my time in Wyoming we were given free housing by a hospital. So we asked what we could do to thank them, and they said, paint our fence. But this wasn't just any fence—no, this was a mile-long, dilapidated picket fence, almost an hour away from the Reservation these kids came to see.

But I wasn't concerned. I figured I'd just do what my dad does when he has a big project—rely on child labor. You'd know I'd be like Tom Sawyer who weasels out of



painting a fence by pretending he's having so much fun that he gets his idiot friends to do it—not that Christian kids are idiots. But I thought all we'd have to do was get excited about the fence and it would get done. But kids today are smart. They have Wii and iPhones and Internet porn. Kids today know what fun is. And fun does not look like painting a fence.

So at the end of the week after the first group of kids had gone back home, I looked out at the nine-tenths-of-a-mile fence that was left and looked at the two weeks left in our program and thought, "We are not going to get this done. We are going to leave here with a half-painted fence, and the hospital won't let us stay here next year, and these Native Americans will never again have the chance to have their houses painted by amateurs! So I prayed: "God, if you can, please somehow get this fence painted."

The next week, a new group of kids showed up from Nebraska, and they are the most athletic teenagers I have ever seen. I mean, when I walk into the boys' room, these ripped guys have their shirts off, some are doing push ups and sit ups. And when I told them that today some of them are going to have to paint this fence, they said, "Alright, let's go!"

"Okay," I say, "I'll be over on the reservation doing something awesome. Good luck." And I left.

Around two o'clock I came to check on them, and they're just sitting on the grass, laughing, talking, and giggling. And I say, "Hey, guys, how's it going?"

"It's going great! We finished the fence a half hour ago!" one of them said.

"What?" I asked.

"Yeah, and we even went back and filled in spots that the last group missed," a third kid said.

"Yeah. We had two teams and each team had scrapers, sanders, primers, and painters, and we raced to the end. And my team totally won," the first kid said.

And while they were having fun, I was in shock. Even though I claim to believe in God and that prayers come true, I could not believe that this one fence got painted in a mere five hours, but it did.

So apparently telling lies about how awesome it is to paint a fence doesn't work. Instead, lying to ourselves that this horrible job is just a game—that kind of lie—creates miracles. Which was particularly shocking for me, being a liberal Quaker who avoids competition and any games with winners and losers.

I guess everything has its place under the sun, even that sin of competition, especially when Nebraskans are involved.

Paulette Meier – A Musical Performance

Paulette is well known for her stunning a capella recordings and performances of favorite Quaker quotations set to her original music. She often leads rounds of singing at Quaker gatherings. For Open Mic, she performed some of her new work, which included quotations from Thomas Kelley, as well as new works from George Fox's writings. She also performed a recently commissioned piece in Hebrew from Song of Solomon.



Virginia Swain – A Call to Wholeness

Virginia shared the beginning of Chapter 1, “The Light Within,” from Thomas Kelley’s *A Testament of Devotion* “that inspires my work at the UN,” she explained. She followed with excerpts from her autobiography, *A Mantle of Roses: A Woman’s Journey Home to Peace*.

From *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas R. Kelly, p. 3:

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto itself. Yielding to these persuasions, gladly committing ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely, to the Light Within, is the beginning of true life. It is a dynamic center, a creative Life that presses to birth within us. It is a Light Within which illumines the face of God and casts new shadows and new glories upon the face of men (and women). It is a seed stirring to life if we do not choke it. It is the Shekinah of the soul, the Presence in the midst. Here is the Slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And He is within us all.

A Mantle of Roses: A Woman’s Journey Home to Peace is the story of how my life and work changed dramatically over a twenty-year period. Bobby, my brother, died suddenly the day after he needed my comforting presence. I had been too busy in the midst of the demands of my corporate job as a human resources manager. I did not have the resources to handle the darkness that enveloped me from my traditional Christianity. The challenges of a fifteen-month period after Bobby died also included facing the deaths of my father and my marriage. Over time, I heard a prompting in my heart that I couldn’t ignore—a call to wholeness, balance, peace and marriage—where I was able to come to terms with the overwhelming events of my life. I found spiritual resources that guided me to claim my vocation, worth and contribution to society, marry again, and reconcile with friends and family.

As part of my reflection time, I took an eighteen-month sabbatical on a mountain in northern California, Mt. Tamalpais. Because of my time on Mt. Tamalpais and other spiritual experiences over the twenty years, I learned how to listen, access and act from the voice of the Holy Spirit within me. I incorporated all that I learned to begin new development and leadership models for a post-September 11th sustainable peace. I



mentor others now, in the light of new awareness of how my unconscious patterns ruled my life without my knowledge.

Little did I know that twelve years after Bobby's death, freed from the memories of my past, I would be teaching reconciliation and leadership processes in the United Nations and around the world that rise from a speaking Presence and infuse my voice and action life.

Wayne Swanger – Poetry Recital

Wayne read from his collection of original poetry.

Centered

Mistaken,
I thought it was the cat purring
Then I realized
It was my soul comforted
In the presence of God.

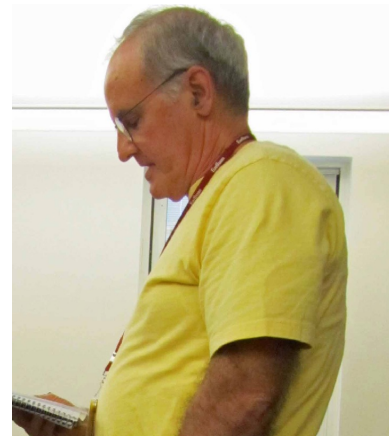
Potluck

Jasmine, white blossoms from Arabia,
Offer their fragrance to a child of light
Wracked by manic laughter.
She harbors demons
In grey dresses and white bonnet,
Offers suffering to friends
With a glass of iced tea and granola bars
While reading poetry too dark
To be understood
Only felt.

Compassion: A Missed Opportunity

(published in *Friends Journal*)

The old man holding a cardboard sign
stapled to two pieces of wood
stood on the periphery of the crowd.
His body tensed as he strained to keep the sign aloft.
Staring straight ahead he spoke to no one
as if he could get the speaker's attention by resolve alone.



The man moved to the center of the crowd
and held the sign in front of the speaker
who gave no indication of notice.
He slowly turned around and the crowd read
this message written in a coarse hand:

I trust my life
and the lives of my two marine sons
in the hands of President Bush.
God bless America.

I, who believe his trust given to the untrustworthy,
and his faith rested on the shifting sands of politics,
felt pity for this father of two beloved sons.
Today, just a day later,
I regret not following the old man as he left the crowd.
I might have offered him my hand
and bought him a cup of coffee.
I could have asked him his sons' names
and where they are stationed,
smiled, nodded, and said that he must be proud of his boys.
I should have wished them both peace and God's protection.

Betsy Meyer – My Date with the Devil

As a liberal Friend, a member of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, holding fast to the tenet that there is that of God in everyone, I did not really believe in the Devil. Until I met the Devil.

In the mid-1990s, Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) was preparing to host the 1999 Friends United Meeting (FUM) Triennial in Williamsburg, Virginia. This was a big deal for us in BYM because, though BYM has been a member of FUM since its inception in 1902, most members of FUM were more Christ-centered and Evangelical than many BYM Friends. Being a good host was an opportunity for BYM to invite others in FUM into a deeper relationship with us. And it was an opportunity to invite BYM Friends into fuller participation in FUM. The BYM members working on the hosting (I was not one of these Friends, but I understood the importance of their work) felt under pressure to pull this off without a hitch. At the same time, non-BYM organizers of the Triennial must have thought it would be nice for the hosts if the speakers committee invited

someone from BYM to be one of the plenary speakers, and for some reason, they invited me to give one of the Bible sermons.

I received the invitation to speak about a year and a half before the event was to occur. Now you may have had this experience, too: Something may seem scary if you were asked to do it soon, but if you are thinking about doing it a year and a half from now, well it is easy to say you will do it. Something that will happen so far away does not seem scary at all. So of course, I accepted the invitation.

The Triennial theme was “Whom shall I send?” based on verses from the sixth chapter of Isaiah, and I was asked to speak about Isaiah’s cleansing and preparation for ministry. I don’t have any training in public speaking. I have never taken a course in homiletics. I just love scripture. I feel the Divine speaking through scripture, and I enjoy sharing with others what has been opened to me. If I am going to speak about a passage of scripture, I have to live with the scripture and just see what is opened to me. I cannot preach someone else’s sermon; I only can preach what I have experienced myself. So I did not bother seeking out what others had to say about that particular scripture. First I memorized the passage, and I read a little bit about the historical background for some context. Then I just lived into the scripture, reciting it to myself at quiet times in my daily activities, expecting the Divine to open its meaning.

Over the next year, the meaning was opened to me, a bit at a time. I was given to understand that God works through painful experiences to open our hearts to prepare us for ministry. Then I realized that I needed something personal to illustrate the point. Of course, like everyone else, I have had my share of painful experiences, but nothing seemed to be right for the sermon. I realized that I would have to pray for something suitable. I was reluctant to ask for something painful, but I knew there was nothing else I could do. So like a martyr of old, I prayed for suffering. Soon afterward, my husband (he really is the sweetest guy; this was uncharacteristic for him) teased me about some embarrassing event from years before. It hurt, but then I had a vision of a transparent layer of ego just peeling away from me. I recognized with joy that this was the answer to my prayer.

So I received the pieces of my message in disjointed bits. Then, I was given the structure, but I still had not begun to write, and time was getting short. At last, a month before the Triennial, I felt the leading to write the sermon. By this time it was so well formed in my head that when I sat down at the keyboard, the message just flew from my fingers. In just one hour it was typed and had undergone the first edit. Thinking I was off to a pretty good start, I printed out a draft and tucked it safely away on a shelf.

That is when I heard it. It was a raspy, nasty voice that I had never heard before. It rasped out, “Who do you think you are? You can’t do this. You have never even been

to seminary. You can't preach to this group which will include professional preachers. You have nothing new to offer them."

I tried to defend myself to the voice, arguing that I had never misrepresented my credentials, but the voice came back at me telling me that my talk was too short, and later telling me the talk was too long. On and on it went. I would hear it whenever I had a quiet moment. Arguing with the voice was useless; it would just attack me from another angle. While this was going on, I couldn't go near the shelf where I had put away my draft sermon. I was paralyzed.

After several days of this torture, it came to me that I was hearing the voice of the Devil. Now years ago, a fundamentalist friend had advised me on how to handle the Devil, so I tried it. When the voice began to speak up again, I said, "Get thee behind me, Satan!"

It worked. The voice stopped, and I was freed from the paralysis that had gripped me. I was able to finish preparing the sermon and to go on to the Triennial. The night before I was to give the message, I felt waves of spiritual energy washing over me, readying me for the work I was to do.

I delivered that message that the Devil didn't want me to give, and it was well received. At one point as I was preaching, an "Amen!" spontaneously arose from the congregation. When the sermon was over, my work was done, and I was free to just enjoy the gathering. During this time, many Friends approached me and shared deeply from their own experiences. Hearing the responses of Friends to my message was my greatest reward for this work. But the comment that I needed to hear the most came from a man who spoke to me right after I had finished preaching. His face was all aglow as he spoke; clearly, he had appreciated the message. He said, "I have been in the pulpit for over 50 years, and I have probably preached on that scripture more than any other, and there was still more to get out of it." This man answered the Devil point by point: yes, an amateur like myself did have something worthwhile to share with professional preachers.

Why did the Devil try to disrupt my sermon? BYM pulled off hosting the 1999 FUM Triennial without a hitch, and my little message was a small part of that success. The good hosting strengthened our relationship with others in FUM; so a few years later, when tensions arose between BYM and others in FUM, we had a good relationship to build on, and Friends on both sides resisted the urge to just split and go separate ways. Instead, BYM Friends worked hard to engage in visitation with others in FUM and to build even stronger bonds among us. My guess is that the Devil was trying to get me to wimp out of my commitment to speak in order to plant seeds of distrust among Friends, but it did not work.

There is a negative force that tries to interfere with the work that God would have us do. If you recognize it and name it, you get control over it. The Devil finds the chink in your armor, inserts the knife and twists. It starts with something true like “You don’t have a credential,” and then it twists it to a false conclusion: “Therefore, you cannot do this.” The Devil tried to exploit my inexperience at that time, but I realize that the Devil has many ways and many voices. If I ever should fall in love with my own preaching, I may just hear the Devil purring, “Nobody does it better. Makes me feel sad for the rest. Nobody preaches half as good as you. Baby, you’re the best.” I hope I would be able to recognize that as the voice of the Devil, too.

Janice Stensrude – A Way Forward

The following was written in 2007, when I was attending Mount Lawley Meeting in Perth, Western Australia:

A few years ago, when our Outreach Committee asked for suggestions, I was visited by the notion that being patterns is the most powerful outreach tool for Quakers. I parked that idea in my brain, where it began to attract other related ideas. When a meeting to discern the way forward was announced, I began writing down the ideas that had congregated around that first thought.

I remember some years ago hearing the Dalai Lama say that he believes Buddhism is the best path for all people, but since he is certain that the world is not going to become one hundred percent Buddhist, the next best thing is to help people become the best of whatever they are—Christian, Jew, Muslim, Shinto, *whatever*. I was struck by the practicality of this view. Later I learned about a Buddhist retreat in France that is centered on mindfulness practice, a sort of 24/7 meditation. A Jewish man who had attended said, “I’m still a Jew, but I’m a better Jew, and I’m a better human being than I was before I went.” That was the first idea that was magnetized to my notion of patterning as outreach.

How can we help people be better human beings, better Jews, better Christians, better Muslims, better Hindus, within the structure of their current religious viewpoint?

Later I learned about the work being done to promote peace by UK’s Westmorland Meeting. I was intrigued by the process they had undertaken to discern the way forward for their Meeting and how they had developed their project as an expression of the Peace Testimony. Once having decided they wanted to work on Peace, they undertook a process of *bottom-lining* the issue. They decided to think differently about Peace.



Peace is a moral issue. What if they viewed it, instead, as a practical issue? War is wrong, but is it efficient? Does it accomplish the stated purpose of those who wage war? By adopting a secular viewpoint (Is war profitable?), they found their way forward: interview international decision-makers on their thoughts on the effectiveness of war as a tool to attain national goals. That was the second idea that was magnetized to my notion of patterning as outreach.

What is at the root of the issue? What is the smallest common denominator? How can the individual be influenced to become the foundation of a meaningful collective change?

A few weeks ago, a friend who lives in Houston asked me where Quakers in Houston were meeting. I didn't know the answer and looked for information on the Internet. I discovered the Live Oak Meeting, the only unprogrammed Quaker Meeting in Houston. Included in their website was a description of their "Meeting House Project," the fruit of their discerning the way forward for their Meeting. With a few hundred thousand dollars in their budget (most likely the proceeds from the sale of their old Meetinghouse), they developed a vision of their new Meeting House as part of a community center. They bought land in a neighborhood very near their old Meetinghouse, which was located on the outskirts of the inner city. Their new neighborhood was not too far from there, in an old area of town that embraced all economic brackets and diverse cultures. It was home to many of the working poor, including a large immigrant population. They could build a simple Meetinghouse within their budget constraints, but the vision of a community center on their new acreage was bigger than their budget. They formed a nonprofit corporation and appointed a Board of Directors that included non-Quaker community activists and philanthropists. The new nonprofit raised money to build a new community center on the land where the new Quaker Meetinghouse now sits, in a neighborhood that *needs* and *will benefit from* such a project.

They are visible but not imposing. They are patterns but not evangelists. That was the third idea that was magnetized to my notion of patterning as outreach.

How can we be silently visible as we live by our testimonies?

Last week, my dear friend Joanna, who is a master water colorist, who thinks in paintings, wrote the following that came to her as she was reading about the war in Iraq:

The beloved community initiatives seem to believe, and rightly so, that within us is being born a desire for Simple Living. A movement is growing and has no name. It comes from the heart of those who would be touched by what has happened to this world. For me it is a girl named Amir. It is a horror of the war that this fourteen-year-old girl was raped while her parents and brother were shot in the bedroom. Then she was shot and set on fire. But as she lives for me, she is in a cloak of blue standing at the edge of a war zone and says with grace:

“My name is Amir.” It remains a living image to go on to a painting. How many do not know their names? There is a planetary emergence occurring. It has no name. But it wants to live simply, making gardens to grow food and touching the living things still there. A new Adam, who collectively makes gardens. Barak Obama says, “Individual salvation depends on collective salvation.” The new Adam (humanity) is a collective whose heart embraces the garden. It’s a sign of the times for those who see, whose cup has deepened in the tragedy that is Iraq. In light we live.

That was the fourth idea that was magnetized to my notion of patterning as outreach.

Does our project need to be directly aimed at peace or nonviolence or integrity or simplicity or any of the testimonies, or can it be simply a project that grows community?

Joanna’s vision of gardens brought back a memory of a community garden in Houston that was an offshoot of a project to grow future scientists and mathematicians from among the populations of the poor in Houston, primarily the African American and Spanish-speaking working poor. The program’s centerpiece was a series of Saturday events that involved children and their parents in skill-building math and science activities. Every child in attendance had to be accompanied by a parent or other adult family member. One of the activities for one of the schools involved creating a vegetable garden that would be tended by the children and their adult partners as part of each Saturday’s activities. A local organic farming expert was approached and accepted the role of facilitator. Children and parents came daily, after school and work, to watch their plants grow and pull up weeds. By the time the vegetables were being harvested, the neighborhood had received permission from the school (which had unusually large grounds) to expand the size of the garden and include anyone in the neighborhood who wanted to participate. The neighborhood became more cohesive, and families who lived marginally had copious quantities of healthy organic vegetables to add to their diets. This was a project that grew community.

So those are my thoughts. The root of the planet is the community, and the root of the community is the individual. My thoughts have bottom-lined to reaching the hearts and minds of individuals in our community. I can imagine a community center adjoining a Quaker Meetinghouse. I can imagine programs that involve children and parents. I can imagine community gardens springing up in poor areas throughout Australia. I can imagine a program to address social cruelty and bullying in schools—a sort of children’s Alternatives to Violence Project, from preschool through secondary. I can imagine a Children’s Center for Peace and Nonviolence.

The root of the individual is childhood.

Addendum dated October 2013: Reading this now, eight years later, it comes to me that the root of the individual is the life of the spirit planted in the community. It is not a hierarchical stairway to heaven, but truly a circle of life that cycles through flesh and spirit.

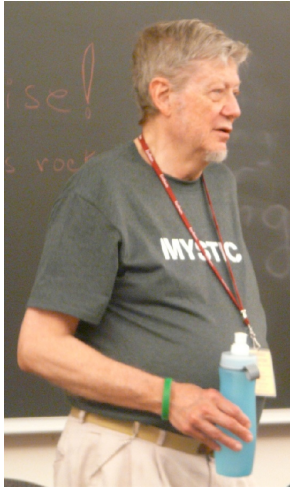
Addendum dated June 2014: By the time the Live Oak Meetinghouse was completed, the entire neighborhood had been supplanted with expensive townhomes and modern copies of two-story Victorians. I did not know at the time that the community at large that financially supported the building of the new structure was more accurately the art community at large. Since the installation of a sky space by famed artist in light, James Turrell, was supported by the community at large, the Meetinghouse is open to the public each Friday evening at sunset, when the sky space is opened. Shortly after completing this commission, Turrell returned to the Quakerism of his childhood. He has since designed a sky space in Britain and one for a Quaker Meetinghouse in Australia. It also occurred to me as I read this that *community* is a testimony.

Jennifer Elam – A Shared Dance

Suffering from back pain, Jennifer began, “I want to get well so I can dance. . . . You gotta say, ‘As I’m getting well, I’m doing X.’ I hadn’t planned to say anything, but Spirit says I should. You gotta dance when the Spirit says dance.” Jennifer began to slowly sway. Someone broke into song to accompany her movement. Shortly everyone was swaying, spinning, and dancing along with Jennifer, and some joined in the music making. We were each participating in a healing dance.



Earl Smith – The Power of the Spirit



Earl told about the summer of 1992, when he was invited to be chaplain for visitors to the Rocky Knob Campground, a part of the National Park Service on the Blue Ridge Parkway in southern Virginia. Since it was policy that campers could only stay for seven days, he preached to a new congregation every Sunday. He had many good memories of those three months, in particular a time when he was approached after Sunday service by a young man who identified himself as a seminary student. “I feel like you gave that sermon with me in mind,” the young man told Earl, “which showed me the power of the Spirit.”

Mike Resman – Nonviolent Communication

Mike spoke extemporaneously about a favorite topic. The following is a summary that he wrote for the Proceedings.

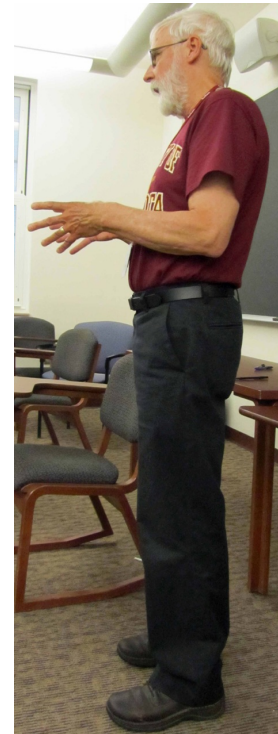
My Understanding of the Core of Nonviolent Communication

When done well, NVC provides tools that enable individuals to speak in ways that result in conversations producing mutual awareness of each other’s humanity. Pain and fear are acknowledged and anger is diffused. The needs of both people are addressed.

How does this come about? It happens as the result of values that are counter-cultural, leading to paradoxical behaviors. NVC is based on ideas that at first blush appear ridiculous:

- We are put on this earth to make compassionate connections with others.
- When someone is angry or upset with us, rather than defending ourselves, displaying our vulnerability will help resolve the conflict.
- Lasting happiness is best achieved through forming relationships.
- We should only do those things that make our life wonderful.

Part of what makes NVC so challenging to grasp is that it combines spirituality, philosophy, and psychology. Practitioners must first root around inside themselves and examine their value.



Why should I reach out to this person who is angry with me? (Clearly for no good reason, for I'm a good person who tries to do the right thing.) "That person who is behaving in ways I don't like or is disagreeing with me is certainly someone to avoid." "They weren't nice to me, so I won't have anything to do with them in the future." NVC would say that striving to make a connection with them would get everyone's needs met.



Stuart Greene – A Concern About Words

No summary of Stuart's presentation was offered, but a really good discussion by him of words and labels can be found on page 69, as part of an Internet discussion on *mystic* as a label.

Marie Vandebark – Guides on the Way

Marie was one of the first to come forward with a presentation. She was a great "opening act," leading us all in prayerful song. As the evening progressed, she remembered—and wanted to share—a mysterious and mystical event that she had experienced since the 2013 Gathering:

It is a teaching day or a day I am going into the office to prepare for teaching. I enter the building and start up the stairway. I climb a flight or two of stairs when the voice inside me says in German, "Bitte, bleiben Sie hier. Wir haben etwas gemacht" [Please stay here. We have done something.]

Of course this raised lots of questions for me. For starters what "we" is communicating with me? And then, what is it that they have done?

I begin at once to try out possible answers so I can figure out what to do. My first thought, based on the content, is that there is some kind of safety concern, though I do

not feel threatened. Because I had suspected someone on the sixth floor of improper dealings with students, I think maybe I am being warned to stay out of trouble.

Whatever it is, I decide it is best to remain in place and not ascend the remaining stairs until I get the go-ahead to do so. So I pause on the stairway and begin to feel a bit foolish. What will people think as they come and go and I just stay there? Eventually I find it too difficult to just stay in place. I decide the problem may be the stairs and not the ascent, so I withdraw into the main part of the building to catch the elevator. I get to the sixth floor with no big problem.

Later I revisit the occurrence testing out different ways of viewing it. It seems to make a certain kind of sense in light of my place in the institution and another kind of sense in light of the energy centers in my body.

I was in my first semester of teaching at this university—a job I picked up pretty much by chance, not having become certain that I even wanted to be teaching yet, since I was going through a lot of personal issues that were draining and time-consuming. I would be evaluated by my supervisor and by a peer to determine whether it made sense to invite me to stay longer in my adjunct position. My boss was aware of my waffling over being there. Perhaps she was part of the “we.” Perhaps the “we” represented the department or the institution that stood to benefit from keeping me on for teaching in the next semester.

When I thought of German, two things came to mind. The first was my boss, whose office bordered mine. I knew she spoke German. She and I were two of the very few women in the department. Clearly it would be nicer to have more women than to have fewer.

But I also thought of my father, who spoke sufficient German to get through the requirements for his Ph.D. My Dad died in 1999.

Then again, there is the possibility of this being almost like a waking dream, meant to communicate to me in symbols what was going on in my psyche and what needed to happen in concrete terms in my life. In terms of numbers, colors, and regions of my body, an ascent up several levels in a seven-story building might mimic the yogic path from the most basic, survival-based concerns of the self toward the most spiritually expansive possibilities. Step one is red, survival, and the lowest part of the trunk of the human body. Step two is orange, associated with sex, reproduction and a sense of belonging—as in one’s family. Step three is the solar plexus, associated with a sense of self and accomplishment. Step four is the heart, the site of compassion. Step five is the throat, a place of speech, creativity and self-expression. Step six is the place of insight and vision—the third eye. Step seven is the crown of the head. Being a person of vision, I like to think of my place as in that deep blue/indigo place. I belong on the sixth floor.

But because of what's up in my life I am having to attend to orange issues. I am invited to stay, but not to ascend.

As the year turned out, I got invited to stay a second semester, but only provisionally. Something was done to keep me, but I wouldn't fully belong. It would be summer before I resolved the issue of belonging and my sexual place in the world—outside my marriage. The story continues, but the insight on the way was a powerful message and reminder to be attentive and faithful, not getting so fixed on where I think I ought to be and what I think I need and deserve that I fail to attend to more basic matters.

I am becoming whole and learning to give greater credence to the idea of guides on the way.



Sunday Morning Worship with Clear Creek Meeting in Stout Memorial Meeting House on Earlham Campus

On Sunday morning, attendees at the Mystics Gathering attended the meeting of Clear Creek Meeting Friends and enjoyed their hospitality and good conversation during post-meeting coffee. A veritable banquet of savory and sweet treats were laid out, along with plates of fresh fruit. As Clear Creek Meeting was preparing for their Meeting for Worship for Business, our group soon said our goodbyes to our hosts and adjourned to the dining hall for lunch. Lunch was our final opportunity to say farewell to those who were not staying for Extended Worship.



Extended Worship: Naming the Spiritual Condition of the World

We had originally planned to use the meetinghouse where Clear Creek Friends meet for our two days of extended worship. But two of our participants who are especially sensitive to spirits said there was too much negativity in that large room. Others felt that the room was too big for the intimate worship we desired. So we met in the library, which was upstairs. We realized it was Pentecost Sunday, so we dubbed it the "Upper Room." I pulled out my Kindle, went to the Bible, and looked up Pentecost in Acts to see exactly what went on in the upper room. I was reading it aloud to the group, how the disciples regrouped after a period of great confusion and went to the upper room. A sound from heaven came like a great rushing wind and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. Then Peter stood and gave a sermon. I came to the end of one screen, saying, "and Peter said --- Oops!" Instead of moving to the next screen, I had hit the wrong part of the screen and moved out of Acts altogether. "That's not what Peter said." I had to paraphrase that Peter said that these men are not drunk as you all think and he quoted the prophet Joel,

*"in the last days it shall be, God declares that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."
(Acts 2:17)*

The disciples ask what they should do and Peter tells them to "repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

It seemed to me that we were being charged in the same way that Peter charged the Disciples on Pentecost.

But the problem of the negativity in the large meeting room still concerned those with a high sensitivity to spirits, so we decided to do a favor for the Clear Creek Meeting and clear out their meeting room. I didn't know how this would be done, but went at the agreed upon time. There were six or eight of us participating. We sat in worshipful silence while the two who sensed the spirits spoke to them and heard their stories. We prayed for them and asked them to leave, that God would comfort them. We said the Lord's Prayer and left the room, hoping it had been cleared of negativity. — Judy Lumb



After Sunday lunch, the remaining 20 began the work of naming our spiritual condition. Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson, whose leading had been adopted as the 2014 theme by the Gathering organizers, acted as host and group leader. Months before the Gathering convened, Rhonda had announced a change. After much contemplation, she had perceived that, before we took on anything so all-encompassing as naming the spiritual condition of the world, we might better consider beginning by naming our own (individual) spiritual condition.

“This group has competencies,” she began on Sunday afternoon. “It’s more about healing than I thought before. . . . We have different competencies to see the spiritual world. We are being called to use these inward competencies in a more outward focus.” She saw it as “improving the condition of those being marginalized, primarily Native Americans.”

Rhonda called attention to the WCTS blog that had been set up for “Naming the Spiritual Condition of the World,” where she would continue to share the fruits of her leading.

Having set the tone, we went into prayerful silence, open to receive. The response from Spirit that afternoon and evening and throughout the duration of the extended worship yielded rich rewards.

The scheduled walking meditation for Sunday evening was rained out. A few retired early to their rooms; others gathered in the Upper Room for snacks and singing.

Near midday on Monday, following our morning's extended worship, we divided into small groups. We thought of ourselves as Home Groups—sharing the same sense of camaraderie, but the nature and purpose of these groups was somewhat different. We met only this once and for the specific purpose of small-group worship sharing.



Betsy Meyer, Jan Goodman, Stuart Greene, Mark McGinnis, Earl Smith, and Judy Lumb were members of one of the small worship-sharing groups formed from among those who stayed for the Sunday-to-Tuesday Extended Worship session.

On Tuesday, the topic of naming ourselves “mystics” erupted among us.

“A mystic is one who has or has had mystical experiences.”

“No!”

“It’s not a label, but a way of saying I have experiences.”

One by one we owned, disowned, or contemplated the mystic label. The greatest number among us did not think of ourselves as mystics. For some it seemed to be the first time they had given any thought to naming their experience; others thought it a fitting name for their experience; others considered that the “mystic” label inferred more than their experience warranted. It was this interchange that inspired the collection of writings titled “Are You a Mystic?” in the Appendix of these Proceedings.

During our final gathering for worship, Rhonda suggested a query to gather our conversation: What have you gained here? What will you take back to your meeting?

“I went to this meeting of mystics who don’t want to be called mystics who want to do something but don’t know what this is.”

This concise, humorous, and accurate description of our extended worship drew hearty, spontaneous laughter that created a foundation for the heart-felt and earnest responses that, each in turn, began to flow.

“I want people to know that Western mysticism is powerful,” spoke one person. She told about her efforts to start a contemplative prayer group outside Quakers. She had begun by putting a flyer in Whole Foods.

“To be, not do,” spoke another participant. “Making toys makes my life wonderful,” he said. “I will go home and play.” He confided that he wanted to self-publish a book titled *A Contemporary Mysticism*.

“I miss my community,” another spoke up. She had recently moved and did not live within traveling distance of a Quaker meeting. Someone spoke up and gave her the name of a Quaker she knew who lived in that same small town.

“My greatest job is to breathe in and breathe out. I have missed extended worship in my home meeting.”

“Thank you for helping me find my voice again,” said someone who had been retired for the past five years. “I feel energized to do *something*. I need to do other things that will deepen me and deepen people around me.”

“I’ve gained a deeper sense of my own spiritual condition and imperfection.”

“I came here a very needy person and self-centered,” said another, and spoke of a vision that came to him during morning worship: a farmer let go fallow a formerly productive field that had become exhausted. He fertilized it, planted a cover crop, and plowed it under. It became productive again. “That spoke to me of naming my condition—fallow ground. I need to spiritually nurture, monitor the fruit that I bear. And when it goes bad, let it fallow and listen.”

“The concept of creation has been going through my mind. I am thankful to [another] for his vision. . . . Perhaps we are to get primitive Quakerism revived again.”

“My time has not been wasted. With gratitude again, I will take what I have experienced and will be sharing it with a lot of other guys.”

“I’ve gained some more freedom. Feel more expanded.”

Lunch afforded the final opportunity for conversation—looking backward on our experience and forward to another Gathering in 2015. We said our goodbyes at lunch and sometimes again as we crossed paths in Mills Hall as we packed up—and often in the parking lot as we waved to or embraced our fellow F/friends on the Mystical Path.

Post Script

November 3, 2014, Rhonda posted the following to the Gathering Blog:

In November, I will begin posting on a new blog. I invite you to visit **Naming Spirit: Capturing Eternity in Motion** and then to follow it if you like what you see. This change comes as a result of conversation with the other editors of *What Canst Thou Say?* (*WCTS*). We had previously thought that the leading that I had heard at the first gathering of Friendly Mystics was for its participants and upcoming gatherings. While preparing for a recent meeting, I discerned that the leading had *come through* that gathering but was not for it. In order to avoid confusion in the future, we decided that this blog, now **Quaker Mystics: Gathering for Discernment of God’s Guidance** will be devoted to *WCTS*’s gatherings, while my new blog will focus on the leading to name the spiritual condition of the world.

On December 2, 2014, Rhonda posted:

Over the last week or so, I have discerned that my ministry is taking a turn. I had believed that writing was part of my leading to name the spiritual condition of the world. I feel now that I am being called to spend more time with the listening aspect of it. I may be led again to write for a broad audience. When that appears to be so, I will be back. Until then, may you find the love you are longing for.

In Our Own Words: Sharing the Experience

Lois Dinshah “Mystic Tools”

Lois wrote an early email, less than two weeks after the Gathering. It is included here, followed by her essay on her experience at the Gathering, which she submitted a few months later.

June 19, 2014

I have been thinking about the gathering since I got home. I think that on Friday night it would be good to have a game or something that will help people get to know each other. It could be something that is fun. There are many games of getting to know a group. I know that I only got to know a few of the people who were there. I also feel there should be some way that we can learn about how others use the Light, or other “mystic” tools. I know that I have used the Light long before I became a Quaker. When I became a Quaker I thought, “Quakers have the Light, they will use it.” But I was disappointed that the other groups I have been in used the Light more than the Quakers I joined. In 2005 I taught a few workshops on Working with the Light. I have used the Light since I was 19. I didn’t become a Quaker until after I had six kids. I am very pleased to be in a Quaker group that uses the Light for more than sending it to someone who is ill.

October, 2014

When I first read about a gathering of those who read the *What Canst Thou Say?* newsletter, I wanted to attend, but couldn’t. I had been a part of the Interest Group of FGC in 1993 that led to this newsletter getting started. Then when it was announced the following year and we saw that the cost was reasonable, my husband Roshan and I both wanted to attend. We left on Thursday, June 5, and drove to Dayton, Ohio, where we had motel reservations. On Friday morning, we visited Sun Dance Indian Archeological Museum and Park, which is at the most southern part of Dayton. We enjoyed learning about the Indians who had lived there and their culture.

In the afternoon, we drove on to Richmond, Indiana, to the Earlham School of Religion. We found the campus, but had to ask where to find the “What Canst Thou Say” group. We found that registration was in the same building in which we were staying. When we checked in, we learned that Marcelle Martin was the only one there that we knew.

The first event was dinner in the dining hall. We had been given a map of the campus, but it was helpful that someone who was going there showed us the way. It was nice to find out at the first meal that there was another vegan among us. We got

acquainted with Rhonda, the other vegan. She also worked with prisons, which each of us have done.

After dinner we met in another building, in the opposite direction from where we had come. It helped that the campus wasn't really very large. There were about thirty or so people sitting in a circle that filled the classroom where we met. We went around the room telling our names and what Meeting we were from, and maybe something about why we were there. Then we counted out to five, and the number we said when we were



Roshan and Lois getting acquainted with Rhonda at dinner.

counting was the number of the group we were to meet with, called the "Home Group." There were five people in my group, and we were given questions to answer about ourselves. The main question for Friday night was, "What are you hoping for here?" I didn't have any idea of what to expect.

Before breakfast every morning, there was early morning worship. Our Home Group met again after breakfast on Saturday. Someone suggested we meet outside, which we did. We were to share our joys and frustrations in our spiritual life. The main questions were: "What is in your way in your spiritual life? How do you see yourself moving beyond your personal obstacles?" I didn't like the questions because I didn't see any answers to them.

After lunch and worship, there were two sets of Interest Groups, one to meet at 1:30 and one to meet at 3:15. I read the list of the Interest Groups and wasn't interested in any of them. Some were left blank at the time I read them, to be made up as someone had an idea to lead. Roshan and I decided to take an afternoon nap and rest up after our long trip.

After supper there was an "Open Mic Night." People performed poems, songs, stories, interpretive dances, or whatever they wanted to share.

After breakfast on Sunday, the Home Groups met again. This time the main questions were: "What have you learned/gained? What do you want to follow up with? What will you do when you get home?" I was not happy with the questions because I didn't think they were helpful for what I thought we were gathering for.

Following Home Group, we had Worship with the Clear Creek Friends Meeting, which was on campus. After Worship, it was announced that we would meet in that

same worship room for extended Worship in the afternoon. I said I would not meet in that room again. One of the leaders asked me why, and I told her there was a negative feeling in the room. She invited me to go with her to other rooms in the building to find a more suitable meeting place. It was decided that we would meet in an upstairs room that we called the “Upper Room.” We also decided to work at clearing the negative energy from the worship room.

After lunch, two of us worked on clearing up the negative energy, and some others volunteered to meet there and send energy to the two of us as we were doing our clearing work. The main negative energy was cleared by one woman, but there was a benign energy that remained. To me the room felt empty, and still does.

Some of the people, who could only stay for the weekend, had left after lunch. That afternoon we had Worship and Worship Sharing in the Upper Room. I think that the plans for Sunday changed and didn’t turn out as the leaders had wanted. It was disclosed that the leaders had wanted the group to decide a way that the group could do something to help the world. There was no coming together as to what they could do. After supper, some people met in the Upper Room for singing.

After Monday breakfast, there was Worship and then small-group Worship Sharing. After lunch we had Worship and large-group Worship Sharing. After supper I joined with a group who went for a walk and then to the Upper Room for singing. We left early on Tuesday morning so we could get home at a reasonable time.

I was glad to have been there and to have met those who were there, especially the few who I was able to get to talk to. I would have liked to have more time to get to know more than those who were in our small group of five people. I also would have liked different questions or some guidelines for us to make up our own questions.

I didn’t get as much out of it as I probably should have because of my problem with hearing. I would like to go again, and I would handle things differently. I would do more to get to know more people and their levels of “mysticism.” I would suggest that there be something planned for the group to work on as a group, to use some of those mystical talents. I think the Interest Groups should be decided before the day they are to happen—perhaps before we get there or on Friday night.

All in all, I was disappointed that there wasn’t really much of anything mystical in any activity. I think that if we were to look at the lives of some Christian mystics, that would be a good place to start to see how we fit into that label. It might suggest some ideas for discussion.

Thomas Fairbank “Sinking Deeper into the Spirit”

Tom responded to the “prompt” questions that were sent to all attenders when asking for a narrative of their experience.

What were your expectations before you arrived? I expected that I would see tangible results for my attendance very soon upon arriving. This would include spiritual revelations, or deep friendships.

What did you take away? I took away a knowledge of how I am a very greedy person. It was oddly calming to learn more about my own sin.

Looking back, what is your most memorable experience of the weekend? The discussion that occurred after our second to last worship about discerning when to speak and not speak during meeting for worship. I enjoyed the emphasis of sinking deeper into the spirit with prolonged worship.

A summary of a Special Interest Group that you led or attended: The special interest group was “Calm the Rhetoric.” It was a discussion of politics, Quakers and leadings. We shared stories of dialogue with those who differ in political perspective from ourselves. I enjoyed it very much.

Lissa Field “Learning About Myself”

I thought it was a great gathering, and I learned a lot about the kind of person I am and the kind of person I want to become. The conversations in my home group were the most important, as it turned out. I had to be careful not to become exhausted, which is pretty normal for me for gatherings. Because of planned graduations, I might not be able to attend in 2015, but would look forward to future gatherings.

Marcelle Martin “Precious New Friendships”

During the weekend gathering, I valued the opportunity to get to know some Friends in my small group. I was also glad to be asked to share in an afternoon interest group what I have learned about the Refiner’s Fire; I’m grateful for our conversation as we looked at some passages written by early Friends about how they experienced being refined by the fire of God’s penetrating Light.

The time that was most memorable to me was the two days (Sunday afternoon through Tuesday lunch) when we gathered in the “Upper Room” in Stout Meetinghouse for periods of extended worship. We were blessed with some remarkable vocal ministry. I felt a deepening in the Spirit during that time, assistance to live more fully in the truth of who God created me (and us) to be and how we are called.

Precious new friendships were formed that have continued since the time of the gathering.

I remember the awesome green beauty of the tall trees on campus, and conversations and contemplation in their shade.

Mark McGinnis “Sharing Dreams”

My expectations were not as high as the first time. But the second time, I was not filled with so much trepidation that I would be the only one with my experiences. I would have hoped we could speak to the condition of the world and find a positive course of action. Like the Cubs say, “There is always next year.” I came away feeling we were going to do something in the future. Steve Allen’s song, “This Could Be the Start of Something Big” kept going through my mind.

For me, the best moment was during a special interest group on dreams. Since most of my mystical experiences involve dreams, to be with others having similar experiences was amazing. Even more amazing was the diversity of different dream experiences. I could have stayed there all day.

Janet Mullen “Finding the Depth of Experience”

I am still trying to take it all in, and don’t feel I have clarity on the whole experience, so much happened in a few days. Current inclinations, though, are to feel that having two different phases was difficult, especially as the first two days were more free flowing, but the second had an agenda, even though it changed. I would also wish that if a change is suggested in the agenda, the group would be invited to seek clearness and have some discernment about what direction is good for the group.

I am wondering if we might continue to process the query of “naming the spiritual condition of the world” in this format, or the blog. I would prefer that to having a separate second session; or perhaps it could be a “track” that some could choose during the weekend. As of now, I feel that a three-day weekend that is a whole, and follows the format of the first weekend and the first two days of this second time, would be ideal.

There were some good queries that evolved in the second phase, having to do with “what does it mean to be a mystic, or have mystical experiences.” Some reluctance to name ourselves as mystics. I believe it would be beneficial to hear someone speak on this, and to give depth to what we are experiencing, and are drawn to. I would like to hear more, both in this format and from a speaker, about the responsibility one has when given these experiences, and also how to discern whether an experience or message is truly inspired.

Having said that, I also treasure the home groups and interest groups as ways to find the depth of experience in each of us and to get to know one another in small groups.

The spirit of the time spent with you in deep discernment continues to rest lightly on my mind and heart, generating more inspiration.

Janice Stensrude “Walk Cheerfully”

I arrived with excited anticipation and bone tired. Last year I was coming from Houston, this year from my new home in Parker, Colorado, near Denver. Flights from Denver to Cincinnati (where Rhonda met me and provided transport to Earlham) are not so schedule friendly as those from Houston. I had to spend the night in a hotel. It was just as well since my flight was late leaving Denver. It seems that it is against federal regulations for any flight to take wing if airport computers are not working, and Denver’s airport computers were down for more than two hours.

By the time flights began to depart, the airport was packed to capacity with humanity. All seating was full, people stood against the wall, and crowds sat on the floor, occupying great expanses of floor space. I was grateful that I wasn’t one of the young parents I saw juggling the needs of their young children. I reached my Cincinnati hotel in the wee hours. A series of small challenges, including an early check-out time and a 9:00 a.m. breakfast cut-off, conspired to prevent adequate opportunity for rest.

It all caught up with me on Saturday afternoon. I lay down for a quick nap and awoke hours later. I had missed the interest groups. And I later missed them in a very real way when I read about the topics.

Open Mic night was a rich experience. The highlight for me was Jennifer Elam’s slow, swaying dance that became a spontaneous celebration of dance and music in which we all participated. There were good story tellers among us, too. I loved Tom Fairbank’s story about painting a fence and learning something about competition. I laughed, too, as Jan Goodman acted out her story of a powerful precognition experience.

Home Groups were a welcome experience for me both last year and this. It was my only opportunity to sit with a small group and converse (adding to my catalog of familiar faces) until I overheard someone mentioning that they used meal times to get acquainted with new people. Approaching strangers isn’t my favorite thing, but I had the advantage of knowing that, whomever I approached, we had at least two important things in common—Quakerism and mysticism.

Last year, the idea of having Proceedings developed late in the gathering—and depended solely on my and other attenders’ memories to build the document. This year, I came prepared with notebook and pen in hand. The pen came up dry the first time I tried to use it. Someone passed me another as I struggled to take notes of Saturday night’s Open Mic presentations. Sunday afternoon that pen stopped working midway through extended worship. I bought a package of three ballpoint pens on Monday, when

the student bookstore opened. By mid morning, one by one, they went from thin, anemic letters to nothing. Why? Maybe it was because the Proceedings were meant to be written by the other participants, not me, or maybe it was Spirit tapping me on the shoulder and saying, “Listen. Pay attention,” or maybe it was simply dried ink in pens that had been too long on the store shelf. With a sigh, I yielded to the inevitability of the situation. I felt the pressure of needing to listen more carefully and hoped that my aging brain would be able to recall enough of it.

Otherwise, having had time to rest and time to socialize with old and new f/Friends, I slipped easily into the extended worship session on Sunday afternoon. I had not fully understood the meaning of “naming the spiritual condition of the world,” nor had I prepared for the announced change to name my own spiritual condition. I came to it fresh and open.

Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson led us into the silence with a short introduction that included a mention of improving the condition of marginalized people. After my pens refused to do my bidding, I received four very short phrases, which I hung onto by repeating them silently to myself, while listening to what others received.

Jennifer Elam quoted 2 Corinthians: “We have these treasures in clay jars,” adding, “You don’t have to be perfect to be a vessel for God’s work.” One by one, others rose to share their messages. When I received the last of the four phrases, I sensed my message was complete and stood to share.

It was in my hotel room on Tuesday night that I wrote my notes. All three pens that had refused to work during extended worship gave up their ink smoothly and effortlessly.

I made a list of what I could remember:

Finding our way.

Mystical activism.

Liberating the light.

Fear of the gift.

Researching the spiritual condition of the world.

Freeing prophets – letting the light in.

Start a restorative justice program. The prophets are in prison.

Serving each other – mystics supporting mystics.

The first thing I recorded, for fear it would escape, was my four phrases. When I had made all my notes from memory, I returned to them:

Go to them.

Speak to their dignity.

The need is self-worth.

Embrace your imperfection.

I ruminated over these short, strong messages. I could connect the first three to Rhonda's statement about marginalized people. I've often noticed that those who are down suffer a loss of a sense of self-worth. Too, they have a deep need to recover their dignity.

The fourth message, I thought, addressed Jennifer's message: "You don't have to be perfect to be a vessel for God's work." Throughout my life I have, from time to time, consciously chosen acts that I would later see as "God's work." Since I didn't know that's what I was doing at the time, I was retrospectively amazed at the results. I suppose I saw these acts as divine inspiration *despite* my imperfection. Here was something new: to embrace that imperfection.

In extended worship, there were several who had arrived with a clear vision of the spiritual condition of the world, some with exciting ideas about how our group could serve it. One saw it as a message about our endangered environment, another came anticipating the formation of some sort of group plan of action. As we concluded, no single direction had emerged. Rhonda announced that she felt that the leading was for her personally, that it was not *for* the gathering but had come *through* the gathering.

The entire experience, ending on a high note with extended worship, was a truly potent one, and I came home with a full mind and an open heart. The day after getting home, I woke with unfinished thoughts about the gathering and wrote:

During my twilight sleep this morning (or should I say dawn's light sleep?), I was reliving the six days at Earlham among Friendly Mystics. In my mind, I divided the time into the days of doingness and the days of beingness. The doingness was essential preparation to the beingness. In the former we had become acquainted, slowly coming into alignment. It was a worthy preparation for two days of beingness, sitting in unified silence. I was remembering the diversity of our small group that represented the spectrum of Quakerism and how we were united in our common experience of mysticism. And that's when I had my insight into the "spiritual condition of the world"; it had to do with unity, and I named it "Coming into Unity."

With that, I felt complete. The world is moving in the right direction, and what we have to contribute, I was thinking, always comes back to George Fox:

Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.

I always have a head full of words and tend to talk too much. So some years ago, as words arose in my head during meeting, I said silently, "I'm not going to speak unless I get some sort of sign." I had barely completed the thought when I could feel a sensation in my arms and legs as I felt literally pushed into a standing position. Rather

than adding an explanation, as I am prone to do, I delivered only the words received. During post-meeting tea and biscuits, I was separately approached by three people, each of whom were deeply and personally touched by my ministry. The three interpretations had nothing in common, and not one had interpreted the message as I had.

I believe that's what transpired with Rhonda's leading. Rhonda perceived it to be personal for her alone, and I suspect that it may have been for all of us—to be manifested individually and personally.

For some, the message was about the environment or a peace rally or reaching out to our vast prison population or any number of worthwhile peace-building activities. In the 1950s, Quaker Rebecca Beard, first a physician and later a faith healer, stressed positive states of mind as the key to physical and spiritual healing. There's George Fox again: walking cheerfully, meeting and greeting everyone, as the God in me recognizes the God in you. And that's my project that arose from our gathering to name the spiritual condition of the world. I may participate in other peace-building exercises from time to time, but it always comes back to walking cheerfully. And some days that's as big a challenge as I can handle.

Wayne Swanger “Replenishing a Nearly Empty Well”

I am grateful that I attended the gathering. It is always a joy to be among Friends; it is especially so when one has been long removed from the support and nurturing of an established Friends community, while under severe personal and professional stress. There were times at the gathering that I was almost giddy with joy whether talking with my roommate, with those sharing a table at meals, or with other attendees while walking about campus. Simply being with everyone was special.

Although I benefitted considerably from informal conversations with Friends as described above, I also found special interest groups, worship sharing and other discussions beneficial. I did not, I suspect, demonstrate spiritual discipline in these more formal forums. I frequently spoke hastily and without proper seasoning. In fact, to many I may have been the proverbial bull in a china shop. I am afraid that I caused discomfort and injury to some with my words. I deeply regret this.

Time spent in worship with others was the highlight of the gathering for me. During worship I found calming and increasingly the Presence of the Spirit whether it was early morning, extended, or preparatory worship that preceded activities or worship sharing. Quite frankly, the primary motivation for attending the gathering was the desire (and hope) that I might begin to replenish the nearly empty well of my spirit. I left gathering greatly refreshed and spiritually awake. Worship with loving Friends was wonderful.

I valued the few times spent sitting quietly on the beautiful Earlham campus. There were occasions when the schedule was put aside and time alone was necessary. These times for solitude and prayer were greatly appreciated.

Next year? Well, I missed the first gathering so I am not certain what took place previously, so forgive me if my thoughts here are redundant. I would like to explore several things including:

- a. The deep experiences that others have had with the Spirit.
- b. How others discern whether an experience is one of the Spirit or something else.
- c. How these experiences have been life changing and world changing (impact on others).
- d. Frequent opportunities to worship together including extended worship would be beneficial.

APPENDIX

Are You A Mystic?

Introduction

The following contributions are included in the Proceedings as an Appendix because they constitute an after-the-fact discussion of an issue that arose in the course of the Gathering. During the days of extended worship, which began on Sunday afternoon, June 8, 2014, the topic of wearing the label “Mystic” came up. Surprisingly, most of those present—all of us attenders at a meeting titled “the Second Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics”—stated that we didn’t consider ourselves mystics. Following the Gathering, the conversation continued on the WCTS Yahoo Group (a transcript of which is included here), and attenders were invited to write an essay of any length on the topic for these Proceedings. Some of the pieces submitted were copies of contributions to the Yahoo Group conversation and so are included in the text of that conversation, rather than appearing as individual essays.

Wayne Swanger’s queries, a tweaked version of the queries he posed in the Yahoo Group conversation, begin our “Are You a Mystic?” discussions, followed by the entire text of the WCTS Yahoo Group’s discussion, which contains a great interchange on vetting God’s voice, in addition to addressing issues surrounding the *mystic* label. Next is Mariellen Gilpin’s discourse on listening for the Divine, followed by Janice Stensrude’s essay about her journey in search of a spiritual practice.

In attendance at the Gathering was our Jennifer Elam, author of a seminal work on mysticism, *Dancing with God Through the Storm: Mysticism and Mental Illness* (Way Opens Press, 2002), and the Pendle Hill Pamphlet by the same name (No. 344, 1999). Jennifer accepted our special invitation to share her thoughts more than a decade after completion of her research project that was the subject of her book. Considering the importance of her work, it seems fitting that she should have the last word.

Queries Regarding the Term Mystic

by Wayne Swanger

I submitted a list of questions earlier regarding the term mystic [Are You a Mystic? Internet Conversation, p. 61]. As I reflect on the gathering, I believe my concerns include:

1. Problems with definitions of mystical experience and mystic.
2. Problems with discernment process to determine whether an experience is mystical and whether one is a mystic.
3. Problems with exceptionalism, that is, are mystics more powerful, special or valued than non-mystics.
4. Problems with answering the nature/nurture question, that is, are mystics born or are mystics developed.
5. Problems with determining why it is necessary to label someone or oneself as a mystic.

Are You a Mystic? An Internet Discussion

from the What Canst Thou Say Yahoo Group

July 15, 2014, Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson wrote:

Recently, at the second gathering of Friendly Mystics, there was some conversation about whether we should call ourselves mystics. I believe some people felt that our using the term mystic as a personal identifier was ascribing too much to ourselves, promoting ourselves too highly relative to the depth of our experience or extent of relationship with God. Others felt that the use of that term named the truth of their experience and allowed them to own it more completely.

I promised Friends that I would write about this concern. However, as I was writing, I found that I did not know the root of the concern being expressed. For that reason, I feel that I would be over-stepping my bounds by adding more to the conversation.

If the Friends who were part of the initial conversation would share more about the context of the concern and clarify the root of it, I would appreciate it and others may too. It may be that the conversation would be more helpful than anything I write.

July 18, 2014, Wayne Swanger wrote:

Rhonda, I don't remember whether others voiced a concern about calling oneself a mystic, therefore, I believe I should respond with some elaboration on my comments at our gathering. I will do so, but you've caught me at a rather awkward time. First, I am in the last stages of vacating my office as I will officially retire at the end of this month. Second, we are leaving for a much needed vacation until mid-August. In essence, I am a bit distracted at present and for the near future.

I do not want to elaborate on my earlier comments hastily. Unfortunately, my comments at the gathering on Earlham campus were frequently given without proper seasoning. In addition, after a five year semi-isolation from Quaker process and support, my participation did not meet important requirements for constructive spiritual dialogue. I do regret this and do not want to make the same error again. To bring some degree of closure to this error I want to apologize to any Friend that I might have offended. Forgive me.

If I can find the time to write and sufficiently reflect on my concerns with self-identifying myself as a mystic I will send them to you before our return in mid-August. I doubt discussion hinges on my immediate elaboration so please begin without me. My

minimal contribution to the discussion and perhaps a follow up to my comments in June may be reflected in these initial queries:

- What is a mystical experience?
- How do I discern a mystical experience from other extraordinary experiences? Is there a discernment/clearness process?
- Does one simply self-identify oneself as a mystic?
- What are the attributes/characteristics of a mystic? Are there criteria or are there any parameters that might distinguish a mystic from others?
- How does a mystic differ from a Quaker?
- Why should one desire to identify oneself as a mystic?
- What are the advantages of setting oneself apart as a mystic? What are the disadvantages?
- If we consider mystical experiences as a gift, do we suggest that the capacity to have these experiences are innate or bestowed on individuals, and therefore unattainable by spiritual effort and seeking?
- Do our mystical experiences lead to life changes that are profound and evident?
- Does differentiating oneself as a mystic make one exceptional?

Perhaps the queries above were discussed at the first gathering that I did not attend. If so, it is difficult to imagine that they could have been exhausted in a week's time. But, if these queries have been sufficiently addressed, I would be grateful if the fruits were shared with me and my concerns may be lifted.

July 18, 2014, Janice Stensrude wrote:

Wayne, what a wonderful Quakerly response. So true to the popular Quaker saying that at a Quaker meeting you won't get answers, just questions. But such questions! I suppose this is a good time to interject that my understanding of the purpose of the annual gatherings is so that we may offer mutual support and a safe place to talk about our experiences that we have identified as mystical—or in my case, someone pointed out to me that my conversations with God could be classified as mystical. Perhaps, then, we could even say we are seeking a safe place to ask the important questions. And maybe that's one of the differences between Quaker mystics and other mystics—the recognition that certainty is a fleeting illusion, and behind every answer is an infinity of questions.

My invitation to write about “mystic” as a label is an invitation to identify and explore the questions. Since some in the group have been wounded by their meetings' reactions to their experiences, this call for discussion may be more sensitive than I realized. I hope many will muster the courage, as you have, Wayne, to put it out there. I feel that the

Proceedings, as a historical document, should reflect this important concern, even though it is somewhat of a post script to the gathering.

For the first forty or so years of my life I vacillated between being a Christian and not being a Christian, believing in God and not believing in God. In both cases, it was a matter of definition. I would read someone else's definition, and I knew that didn't apply to me, so I would change my classification. A second-century pope famously said, "God is not God's name but an opinion about God." I suppose my labeling myself "mystic" will somewhat follow that same pattern. With my loosest definition, about 95% of the world's population would fall into that category; with my most restrictive definition, maybe a couple of hundred thousand, only a few of whom will become widely recognized and famous (and some of those will fall victim to their egos and have to re-ground themselves).

This is an important discussion, yet it will not change our reasons for wanting to gather in fellowship, nor will it change the fact of our experiences that we have chosen to call mystical. I think it is also important that we continue to be open to newbies who are looking for a place to discuss their experiences that they think may be mystical and to fellow Quakers who are curious about the folks who have mystical experiences. They have such great questions!

And while we are undertaking such weighty thought, I hope we can all be mindful of the humor. I loved the "MYSTIC" shirt that mocked the ones we see on TV that say "FBI" or "SWAT." It made my mind go crazy with tee shirt ideas. At the moment, my favorite shows an asterisk after MYSTIC, and at the bottom is the footnote, "Not licensed by any governmental agency or other certifying authority."

In the meantime, let's all walk cheerfully, answering that of God . . .

September 19, 2014, Tom Fairbank wrote:

Thank you Friends, for your thoughtful comments.

By calling ourselves mystics, are we emphasizing that piece of us which is one with the divine? How can we look to others who do not appear as mystics and yet still see the full depth of God within them?

One of the many things that has impressed me about Saint Francis is his humility. This was a man who had hundreds of followers in the Franciscan order he started, and traveled throughout Europe and the near Middle East to promote the gospel. Yet, when a member of his order said to him, "Francis, the whole world listens to you. Why is that?", Francis thought for a moment and then responded with the following: "God wanted to find the worst sinner he could find. He could not find it, so he found me, and

asked me to speak to others who were guilty of far less sin than myself and tell them of God's love for them.”

Francis did not talk about the hours he spent in prayer each day, the high quality education he had as a child, or his decision to abandon all material possessions and live with lepers in the forest as a means of achieving credibility with others. Instead, he talked about his immense sin.

Francis was so beloved that he was quickly declared a saint after his death, and it seems there is something essential to Francis' ministry in the above quotation. He did not declare himself a mystic, a saint, a man of God, or any of these. He declared himself a sinner.

By calling ourselves mystics is it possible that we may start to see ourselves as greater than we are? Is it possible to have full awareness of one's sin, while also having full joy in the constant presence of God?

Thank you for sharing what is in your hearts and souls with me. I am enriched by this community.

September 19, 2014, Wayne Swanger wrote:

Tom, thank you for your thoughtful contribution to our discourse.

September 24, 2014, Jan Mullen wrote:

My sense of being a mystic is like what makes a flower turn towards the sun. It seems to me to be in our human nature and accessible to all. However, not everyone has the environment which encourages listening to that inward voice, and not all are inclined to develop it. So, I think of 'mystic' as shorthand for 'those who are Seekers, who believe in the inward Voice, the Light, and attend to it.' And therefore they/we validate those experiences and want to speak of them. We're not different than others in having this gift, but we develop it, as a means to better understand what Spirit is speaking to us. Thus, the 'ordinary' but marvelous Quaker attention to how Spirit speaks to us and through us in Meeting for Worship, or in our leadings.

So, I see a call to 'mystics' as no different than a call for a gathering of birdwatchers—everyone can watch birds, but not everyone is all that interested in it.

September 24, 2014, Sally Campbell wrote:

I love this. I especially like how very ordinary she makes the idea of the Inner Light. Yes, it really is there for us all. We just have to slow down and pay attention.

At the Peoples Climate March I carried the sign I'd understood in the silence was the one that was needed. It said "Let us open our hearts to Love's instructions" and on the

other side it said “Do what the Spirit says do.” It seemed to speak to many people in a way they could understand. It really is the fundamental change which would allow us to enjoy sharing this beautiful planet.

Here are the lyrics to a song I wrote you all might enjoy:

Center down and listen up
Give your mind a break.
You may hear within your heart
a truth to make you quake.

The still, small voice is speaking still,
But we move way too fast
To heed its loving counsel
as folks did in the past.

Moses and Muhammad
George Fox and Joan of Arc
Heard words within the silence
Saw Light within the dark.

Center down and listen up
Give your mind a break.
You may hear within your heart
a truth to make you quake.

Shepherds heard the angels say,
“Fear not!” and “Allelu!”
Martin heard “Stand up, my son,
I’ll always be with you.”

Despairing I heard “All’s for joy”
and later “Work with me”
While walking after 9/11
and gazing at a tree.

Center down and listen up
Give your mind a break.

You may hear within your heart
a truth to make you quake.

This moment is a fresh one,
a chance to start anew.
The wise and friendly spirit
would like to speak with you.

October 2, 2014, Mariellen Gilpin wrote:

Hi Tom and Wayne! Thanks for starting this thread, Tom. Sorry to be so slow in responding—and I can't even claim to have been thinking all this time since you wrote! But here is what occurs to me to say in response:

I also think of myself as a sinner—a forgiven sinner who has worked hard to get my life in greater harmony with God. I also think of myself as a slow learner—it's only taken me 36 years to move as far away from that old self as I have, which isn't all that far, frankly. I date my journey to recovery from a moment in 1984 (six years after my psychotic break, years in which I was sorry to be mentally ill, but not-yet sorry for my mistaken choices in life). That night in 1984, I apologized to God for those mistakes . . . and within a year, it was clear to me that while I had a long way to go to get well, I already was very much better. To paraphrase what a Friend said to me recently about his bad cold, "I was 100% better, but not yet 100%." For me, the journey to becoming a mystic involved a long, long detour while I figured out that every mystical experience is not necessarily from God, and I learned the importance of discerning which experiences are from God.

So . . . maybe coming to see oneself as a sinner in desperate need of real help is part of the résumé of some who call themselves mystics.

October 2, 2014, Tom Fairbank wrote:

Thanks for sharing!

October 2, 2014, Wayne Swanger wrote:

Mariellen, I've been thinking of you frequently of late. It is good to hear from you. I had hoped to see you this past summer at Earlham and was very disappointed when I found out you could not attend. Perhaps, someday in the not too distant future we can visit.

I hope that the discussion following the gathering has been beneficial to all concerned. Frankly, I did not intend to offend anyone and hope that some benefit comes of my comments at the gathering (the jury is no doubt still out on that one). I simply

reacted to my growing discomfort that the term mystic was being used to indicate exceptionality, or more accurately superiority. Of particular concern was that the manner in which the term was used to differentiate oneself seemed to be unQuakerly. That is, it set attendees apart from other Friends contrary to the basic tenet of equality. I think too the fact that the attribute was self-ascribed was problematic. It made me feel very uneasy. In addition, my background in sociology and disabilities has made me very sensitive to the deleterious effects of labels.

Mariellen, if I may ask, how are you able to discern whether an experience is from God or not? (These are the types of questions that I think would be beneficial for future gatherings to discuss.) I think this may have been one I included in an earlier posting for the group.

October 3, 2014, Sally Campbell wrote:

A friend of mine created a typo (by mistake) that I like. She meant to write “disabled” but instead wrote “dislabeled.” I agree that labels have a terrible way of limiting love and clear thought. I believe all humans are artists, leaders, friends and mystics. We just don’t always pursue each of these innate callings.

October 5, 2014, Mariellen Gilpin wrote:

Hi Wayne, Hi Sally, I apologize for not seeing these emails earlier. I certainly have full appreciation for Sally’s friend’s cognitive typo! I think the doctor who originally treated me was more into dislabeling than into listening. My semi-pun is that he was a doc who liked to use labels to diss.

Your question, Wayne, is a very good one, whether I’ve ever figured out how to tell the difference between a message from God and one from my own self-interest. I could always figure it out—afterwards!! For me, learning to tell the difference has been a long journey, but it does get better. It’s been at least two years since the last time I lost track of reality even momentarily, and probably a couple years before that to the second-most recent episode.

The single concept that has helped me the most was one I had to figure out for myself, even though it’s a metaphoric representation of what docs mean by dissociation. The way I expressed it back in the late ’90s to the shrink was this: “There’s a deep chasm between me and my feelings. I don’t know what I’m feeling so thoroughly that the only way they can tell me is through speaking to me in voices.” I went on to describe to him what I was doing to try to get in touch with my feelings—“string a phone line across that chasm.” When I described my strategy he really rolled his eyes at me, but I didn’t tell him until I could also tell him it was working—it’d been a couple months since the last time

my voices had derailed me. My strategy worked a lot better than the meds did, by the way.

My method of preventing hallucinating all night, every night was based on the metaphor of clerking a meeting for business. (I've also served my meeting as clerk, so you could consider that I've got the most unique résumé for serving as clerk of a meeting!) What I did was call a conference with my voices each evening before I went to sleep. (I had five voices, by the way.) I addressed them kindly, inviting them to tell me what their feelings, issues and concerns were. I assured them that "we" were not going to rush to any decisions; I was not going to do a power-number on anyone; that we were going to keep talking until we arrived at a sense of the meeting before we made any decisions. And then I listened carefully to what each of us/me had to say. I then summarized for us all and shared my sense of the facts of the situation. I also told the shrink that I had already reduced the number of distinct voices from five to two. When he could get his breath he asked some question the purpose of which was to label me further—I don't remember the question, but basically he was asking whether I was a split personality. No, I assured him, because all of "us" had the same memories. My voices represented different interpretations of the same facts.

He called my method a "pre-emptive strike." I told him that was the wrong metaphor. I was not at war with my voices. We were all me, and we all needed full love and respect. His eyes widened, but he said no more. My husband has served as my medical advocate for many years. Some months after this conversation, he asked the shrink whether other people with my condition might be helped by my method of dealing with voices. The doc snorted dismissively and said, "She made it work for her." He had no interest in studying the method or reporting it in the literature. At one point, he asked if I ever got confused about where reality was, and I told him I made mistakes all the time.

What I didn't tell him and simply assumed he understood was that after each incident of voicing activity, part of my process of reclaiming reality was to remember what my voices had told me and reflect on what my voices were really telling me about my feelings. As you might be able to imagine, there was a certain amount of wish-fulfillment being expressed by some of those previously unexpressed thoughts and feelings! As I came to understand "our" needs and concerns, I began also to find ways to meet my needs in healthier ways. (Why did it never occur to the docs that "talk therapy" might be useful? Because medicine has fads just as much as teenage girls do.) (I do see a counselor now, and have for about 20 years.)

If this answer seems a bit longer than you might have had in mind, Friends, consider that my journey to recovery has taken more than thirty years. (I am a slow learner!)

Basically, when I get messages, I always assume it could be self-interest at work, and try always to weigh that factor into my decisions. There are a few other guidelines:

- 1) God is always concise with me. If I'm having a *long* conversation with a voice, it ain't God on the phone.
- 2) God likes to throw a single word into my train of thought . . . a word that often bounces my thinking out of its self-serving little rut. That single word, reflected on, helps me get my thinking a little more in line with reality. I have to work for my insights, but that single word, sometimes spoken in irony, always surprising, helps me come to insight.
- 3) God's suggestions look always to me like they will lead to longer-term good outcomes for more of us. Self-interest thinks short-term.
- 4) If it's likely to lead to a good outcome for more than just-me, and it's not something I have even the slightest desire to do, it probably is God. My guideline for myself is not to ask whether what is suggested is good, but whether it's the least-worst outcome. That's because changing my ways requires doing hard things, which I won't enjoy, although I'll enjoy the long-term outcomes a great deal.

It's time to get ready for worship! I'm sure this response raises more questions than it answers, and I welcome your questions. I may not answer immediately, but that's because I value them and want to give the best answer I can.

October 6, 2014, Wayne Swanger wrote:

Thank you, Mariellen. I have found myself considering your extraordinary email ever since I received it. I'll not respond at length, I'd like to take some time to consider what you shared. But it does seem that the listing of criteria at the end of your message fits nicely with peace, integrity, equality and simplicity.

I look forward to future correspondence, and more still to a face to face chat.

February 5, 2015, Stuart Greene wrote:

Wayne, I agree that you pose an important question about using "mystic" as a label.

Mariellen, Thanks for sharing your mental process! It feels so instructive the way you installed a mental phone line between yourself and your feelings/voices. From an earlier writing of yours I've found that identifying a feeling with a tangible image (even though it was a come down to my ego) proved helpful for me to conceive of healing.

I admit that I choke on the word "mystic" when it comes to identifying myself, and I've only used it that way a couple of times fairly recently. I have usually used something less descriptive in order to avoid it. I'm working into just naming it as simply as possible

and getting on with the work. But lets get real, the technology of language is all about labeling so the only way to avoid labeling while talking is to speak in metaphor or talk in circles around something. Language sucks that way . . . but as I say that, I don't want to box in this concept so let me add that it sucks in lots of other ways too!

Solution: We "Mystics" could work on reducing our addiction to worded language and use prayer, corporate worship, intentional worship . . . more. Related to this thinking I've felt a sense of irony and significant amount of unease that WCTS utilizes a worded newsletter/journal format, which amongst other things cannot help serving as a method to box in the mystical experience just as words do for so many other things (as I'm doing right now). ;^\

I carry a concern for the roots of prejudice to which the next lower element for examination is our opinions. In conjunction with this is the human penchant for labeling. We seem to want to put everything into groups and give it a label. As soon as we do this we want to make lists as to how each group is different or the same and which is better.

I also resist labeling myself as a Quaker. That view helps me follow that path as I'm led without being boxed in by it. On Sunday mornings I attend worship where I feel the Holy Spirit wants me which, if I'm faithful turns out to be just the right place whether it's Methodist, Catholic or another Friends Meeting. When I follow this way something significant always happens. So I'm a believer in seeking God and feel at home wherever there are seekers of God. I learn more that way and sometimes they learn through me.

Membership I feel is a form of labeling and facilitates separation, and a false sense of security. It bonds us to a group of others and excludes everyone else at the same time. Doesn't sound like progress toward the kingdom of God to me. Nevertheless it is a statement of our human condition. I'm a card carrying member of the RSF and I hate the phrase "necessary evil of our time" so I'm not going to use it because it condones evil. (Okay, I guess that's using it. If I can't find my way around being a hypocrite I might as well have some fun with it.)

What would you do if you didn't believe in the concept of membership for instance but feel clearly led by God to it and continue to be reaffirmed by seeing good fruit from the decision? Join up is what I did and follow the Way as best I can also doing my best to hold the temporary aspect loosely.

Is it an illusion that we must scratch and claw our way out of the pit we are in?

Why does sitting in an intentional worship for healing or some other concern seem foreign to so many Friends? This kind of worship/prayer is activism to me.

Naming

Though naming can appear identical to labeling, it has a Godly connotation to me. I've been led to name spiritual gifts for individuals for instance and I know an elder who is adept at fearlessly naming the "elephant in the room."

IDing the source of spiritual messages

As Mariellen stated, "I could always figure it out—afterwards!!" That's cool because that's where the learning starts but lets not take for granted that Mariellen was able to recognize evil for what it was—a huge gift in itself and not likely to have occurred without her prior intention for this discernment. Intention is huge. Maybe, it's the only thing we own.

IDing messages has been a process and a battle in times of weakness for me with a steep learning curve 'cause I'm also a slow learner. But I'm so grateful for being more aware in recent years of tools that help me do this difficult work. They include:

- Joy as barometer. God's messages have joy in them even if it's only the joy of being faithful for fulfilling a difficult errand. If my dominant emotion is worrying and fussing I start questioning.
- Bodily sensations. Going with my gut as it were. I often get a "good" cramp in my belly when "I'm on the right track with a thought" and a "bad" cramp in a different location when it's a bad idea. I'm told that these can appear as an outgrowth of inner work. *Research Biospiritual Focusing for more info.*
- Recentering myself even as I'm in the process of receiving a spirit message. The Divine source seems to approve and has always waited for me.
- If in my visualizations there are darkened images or parts of images, I must question the source and mentally reject those which are not loving.
- For protection I install a mental image of a membrane which filters out dark influence or I might mentally sing an old hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" or do whatever comes to mind to let the dark influence know that I'm not accepting new darknesses into my space today. I do my best to accept their being with love but not allow attachment.
- Inflexibility in the message. Imagining bold worded type is a flag for me.
- Allowing a message time to mature in me before acting on it. Will I get a subsequent cue to stand and speak? If feeling it might be a leading, will it stick with me or fade in a couple of days?
- I haven't been able to blow up a solid Leading or Calling. There can be a KNOWING quality to some leadings from God that is indestructible even though I might have no outward evidence to logically justify it. At other times

it can take a while to become convinced something is a leading and need Friends help.

March 20, 2015, Mariellen Gilpin wrote:

I have been sick a few days, but carefully hung onto this notestring in order to pick up on this conversational thread.

1) About the “mystic” label. I’ve come to use it freely not because I like putting myself in a separate box from the rest of humanity, but because some aspects of that humanity use the box to say I am lesser: the head-doctors, for instance, who heard no more than my interest in things spiritual and gave me the additional label of “chronically mentally ill.” Because of that leap in assumption from “spiritual” to “chronic head-case,” it’s very important to me to use the mystic label and also let those folks notice for themselves (or not) that I am also functioning. I use the label to challenge their assumptions about what the label means. I leave it to them to decide whether to question their own assumptions. I simply provide more data, should they have room in their box for more of me.

2) I also want to quietly challenge the boxes used by the folks who notice I’m writing in my notebook, and upon inquiry learn I’m journaling. You know, the folks who stride away sniffing, “Gazing at your navel!!” The so-called counselors who are sure that I am simply going to write myself crazier. All I try to do in outward response is politely continue writing, continue reflecting on my experiences, continue trying to learn from my mistakes. Let them notice—or not—that I do get more sane, more functional, despite their assumptions about what it takes to pass for sane, pass for normal, pass for functional.

3) My third reason for using the label “mystic” about myself is that when the human helpers were definitely NOT HELPING, God offered to be my therapist. God was a lot more able to see the whole of me, not just the boxes, and actively work with me to help me get better. Really better. Really functional. Really able to learn more from my mistakes more of the time. For me, to say I am a mystic is to put the credit for my recovery to the Real Therapist.

Lessons In Listening: What Is a Mystic?

by Mariellen Gilpin

The little I've read about the spiritual life I actually read over my best friend's shoulder during study hall. When we finished our homework, we were allowed to read library books. I really didn't like getting hooked on a book just in time to be rudely interrupted by the clanging school bell. If I had less than ten minutes left until the bell rang, often I simply read over my friend's shoulder as she sat in front of me. That was how I learned that mystics were people who expected God to speak to them. When I read that I thought, "Well, I do *expect* to hear from God, but I haven't ever *experienced* it. Not yet, anyway."

Yet it was about that same time that I did hear from God, and just didn't know it until much later. I was a very shy, polite fifteen-year-old when I sat in church one Sunday morning. I was listening to the minister talk to God for us—using seventeenth-century English—*thee, thy, thou*. My expression didn't change outwardly, but inwardly I thought, "Does God not understand perfectly well when we talk to him in twentieth-century English?!" In that instant, I had such a sense of *invitation*. There were no words, but it was as if God said to me, "Go ahead, Mariellen. What would you like to say to me?" I didn't take God up on the invitation then, and it wasn't until I was totally desperate for real help that I began talking to God regularly. Now, 60 years later, I know I not only expected to hear from God, I did. All I had to do was learn how to listen for God. Here are some signposts on my journey to listen for God.

I've learned, for instance, that God tends to speak to me through my gifts. I'm a word-person, so God speaks to me primarily through stories. I do occasionally have a vision or dream, whereas someone who is visually gifted probably has many more numinous dreams, and someone musically gifted will draw courage and sustenance primarily from music.

As a word-person, when I am talking to a friend about something close to my heart, a word or phrase my friend uses may provide a key for further reflection. It's not that the word will be The Answer. I usually have to work for my answers. But that word or phrase will provide a key. I remember a dear Quaker mentor in my meeting, Gardiner Stillwell, did this for me practically every time we shared. I particularly remember him quoting the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*: "Beat on that Cloud with daring darts of love." I can still hear Gardiner's tone of reverence when he shared about persisting in efforts to be in relationship with God. I've learned to listen for that word or phrase that will spark wisdom for me.

I've also learned that an experience earlier in life may turn out to be a metaphor important in understanding a current dilemma. I once listened to a young mother while she remembered riding safely through a rapids on an inner tube, and realized that the perils of young parenthood might also be met with grace by choosing to go with the flow. I often find myself wondering what experience in another time might be enough like my current situation to shed some light upon it.

Going with the flow, however, may turn out to be either an intuition or an unfortunate impulse. I've learned to pay attention to the source of a flow: Is this a Leading, or is it self-interest in all its grittiness? And just because an idea is in my own interest doesn't necessarily mean following it will take me down a wrong turn. Listening to those inner suggestions has to be undertaken with both humility and also readiness to self-correct. Am I ready and willing to learn from this experience?

I've also learned I need to be willing to grow. Do my mystical experiences make me want to *look* good or *feel* good, or do they lead fairly reliably to choosing to *be* good? Am I using those mystic moments of bliss to distract myself from pain, or do I choose to go into the pain and thus grow through it? Sometimes the only way out is through. Quakers ask themselves, "Does Way open?" We try a single baby step on that Way, and see whether the Universe seems to encourage that step. Part of learning to listen for God requires me to also ask, "When Way Opens, am I supposed to go full speed ahead, or am I being invited to take one more baby step, and another, checking after each one?" Sometimes our way forward moves from one stepping stone to another, with a pause on each stone to wait for that next stone to come into view.

I didn't really begin to hear God's voice until I'd learned how to listen. I don't often hear God's voice even yet. I must still need more lessons in listening. Maybe what makes someone a mystic is that we listen for God's voice.

The Making of a Mystic

by Janice Stensrude

The term “mysticism” has Ancient Greek origins, with various, historically determined meanings. Derived from the Greek . . . meaning “to conceal,” it referred to the biblical, the liturgical and the spiritual or contemplative dimensions in early and medieval Christianity, and became associated with “extraordinary experiences and states of mind” in the early modern period. (“Mysticism,” Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mysticism>)

The Society of Friends is perhaps the most remarkable demonstration in history of the availability of mystical experience to groups of open but otherwise ordinary people. (John Ferguson, Encyclopedia of Mysticism)

There is no better way station on the path to mysticism than a Quaker meeting. (Me)

That Sunday afternoon at Earlham when Wayne rejected my simplistic definition of a mystic—“anyone who has mystical experiences”—was the first time I had thought to challenge my generally simplistic approach to the entire topic of mysticism. Evelyn Underhill’s long list of the requirements for those who might aspire to be a mystic would bring any simple-minded approach to the subject to its knees. In the first 139 of her more than 500 pages, I noted five occurrences of the term “true mystic,” each one an introduction to a discussion of the genius and difficulties behind being a “true mystic.” She wrote:

We do not call every one . . . a musician who has learnt to play the piano. The true mystic is the person in whom such powers transcend the merely artistic and visionary stage, and are exalted to the point of genius. . . . [Mysticism is] a complete system of life carrying its own guarantees and obligations. (p. 75)

Geez! No wonder I got called on my ridiculously brief definition.

“Evelyn Underhill [1875-1941] was an English Anglo-Catholic writer and pacifist known for her numerous works on religion and spiritual practice, in particular Christian mysticism,” Wikipedia told me. Rufus Jones (1863-1948)—Quaker philosopher,

educator, and mystic—listed Underhill as one of a half dozen or so scholars that he recognized as authorities on mysticism. Jones was Underhill's contemporary and is my go-to Quaker philosopher and favorite Quaker author. If one of my primary thought heroes endorsed Underhill's work, I couldn't easily dismiss what she had to say.

The mystics about whom Underhill wrote were all "great mystics." The mystics about whom Quaker Jennifer Elam wrote in *Dancing with God Through the Storm*—the more than 100 people she interviewed about their mystical experiences—were like people I know. In retrospect, I can see that Underhill and Elam form the perfect sandwich for the serendipitous collection of mystical writing I was about to ingest.

Living Mystics

Matthew Hedstrom, Assistant Professor of Religion at University of Virginia, called attention to an article in the October 11, 1948 issue of *Time* that reported the publication of two "quietly stirring" new books on mysticism, one by the young Thomas Merton, the other by Rufus Jones, who had died the previous June. Hedstrom quoted from the *Time* article: "Both men re-emphasize two facts often forgotten: the world still has millions of mystics, and the most mystical human beings are often among the most practical as well."

In 1930 Jones had estimated that for every known mystic, there were perhaps unknown hundreds quietly going about God's business. By 1944 he had seen the numbers much greater: "Where there has been one mystic who has put his experiences into literary form there doubtless were a thousand who had the vision but who did not write."

From hundreds in 1930 to thousands in 1944 and *millions* in 1948. What a relief! Most of what I had been reading that used the term *mystic* were discussions of the lives and characteristics of long-dead religious figures—most frequently Catholic saints, but with a fair assortment of their non-Christian contemporaries thrown into the mix. This group, who lived during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (with a few notables in the fifteenth century), were the prototypes of mysticism, and when writers wrote simply "the mystics," this is to whom they referred.

So there were living mystics at the time of Jones's death in 1948 and at the time of Elam's research that was published in 2002. With Elam on one side and Underhill on the other, I began to add layers to my mystical sandwich. The Jones layer was added atop Elam. On the Underhill side I soon added a layer of John Yungblut (1913-1995).

Yungblut was a Quaker writer and scholar of Quakerism and Jungian psychology. He came to Quakerism after a 20-year career as an Episcopal priest and, like Jones, had an impressive education, as well as an impressive list of publications. Though a younger

contemporary of Jones, his views on the stuff of which mystics are made was more conservative, yet still in line with many of today's writers on mysticism. First, he narrowed the field of what could be considered mystical experience:

It is much easier to say what mysticism is not, than what it is. The essence of the mystical experience has nothing to do with the occult, the esoteric, extra-sensory perception, spiritualism, hearing voices or seeing visions, with all of which it is sometimes confused in the popular mind. The most that can be said is that mystics are sometimes the kind of persons who may also be psychics and who may hear voices or see visions. But some of the greatest of the mystics have not experienced any distractions in these directions, and others, like John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, have been very wary of the messages so received. (*Quakerism*, p. 5)

Jones, on the other hand, offered a broader definition:

The word "mystic," as I shall use it, stands for a person who insists on a somewhat wider range of first-hand acquaintance with reality or of direct experience than that which is confined to the operation of the five or more special senses. (*Some Exponents*, p. 15)

Jones's definition foreshadows the spiritual revolution that birthed the New Age Movement. His largesse became a powerful tool in his life's work—first, bringing together the splintered Religious Society of Friends and, second, participating in (if not birthing) an ecumenical spirit among many different religious groups through the common thread of mysticism. Hedstrom wrote:

Jones, both as scholar of mysticism and through his personal example and activism, promoted an egalitarian mysticism, open to all. Mystical union with the divine, according to Jones, was not a privilege reserved only for the great spiritual athletes. But Jones did not just theorize—he also popularized. His willingness to market himself to the masses was a critical stimulus towards the popular embrace of a mystical emphasis in liberal Protestant spirituality, both because of his own direct influence and because of his influence on even more popular writers such as Howard Thurman and Harry Emerson Fosdick. This middlebrow of mysticism paved the way for the success of a wide range of mystical writers to come, starting with Thomas Merton and lasting into the New Age. (para. 2)

Jones was not the only writer to speak encouragingly of mystics in the present tense. Rebecca Beard—Quaker, physician, faith healer—wrote three books in the early 1950s about "spiritual healing." Her emphasis was on prayer and positive thinking, but she was

a great admirer of Rufus Moseley (1870-1954), whom she dubbed “a great modern mystic” (*Goal*, p. 92)—not *the* great modern mystic, but *a* great modern mystic. In her book, mystics came in multiples, again confirming that all the mystics weren’t dead after all.

My mystical sandwich was completed with a rich filling of Beard and the other Quaker writers I read. When finished, it looked like this:

R U F U S M . J O N E S
 J E N N I F E R E L A M
 A b b o t t
 B e a r d
 B r i n t o n
 C a r r o l l
 C r o m
 F i n n
 F l o r y
 G o u l d
 H e d s t r o m
 H o d g k i n
 O l m s t e d
 S t e e r e
 V i n i n g
 J O H N Y U N G B L U T
 E V E L Y N U N D E R H I L L

Emotional Crises and Mystical Experience

In my reading, one point of agreement among all writers was that emotion is more important than intellect in the making of a mystical experience. In the battle between heart and head, it seems, mysticism thrives when the heart dominates. Underhill wrote about the “act of perfect concentration” that is created with intense emotion:

It is a matter of experience that in our moments of deep emotion, transitory though they be, we plunge deeper into the reality of things than we can hope to do in hours of the most brilliant argument. . . . passion rouses to activity not merely the mind, but the whole vitality of man. It is the lover, the poet, the mourner, the convert, who shares for a moment the mystic’s privilege of lifting that Veil of Isis which science handles so helplessly, leaving only her dirty fingermarks behind. (p. 48)

Elam wrote that many of her research subjects reported mystical experiences at times of emotional intensity. “New openings or deepenings (further openings to God) appear to occur most often during times of stress, loss, grief, trauma, or when we are feeling overwhelmed,” she wrote.

I, too, found this to be true among those who shared with me their stories of a brush with God. When I think of the people I have known who reported mystical experiences, I see mostly a pattern of dramatic response to intense grief, fear, or unbearable disappointment.

I think of Brian, a plastic surgeon who grew up in a secular Jewish family and knew very little about the faith of his Jewish ancestors and nothing at all about other faith traditions. He was a self-described “staunch atheist.” “I knew people who had a deep and

abiding faith in something greater than themselves, and I thought they were fools,” he told me.

Brian had a good reputation, a thriving practice, and he loved his work. Following the death of his wife from a lingering cancer, he suffered a dark period, not just from the grief of his loss but also from the finally acknowledged fact that he had been one of those men who spent his days as a hero healer and his evenings as a perpetrator of unspeakable domestic violence. The only witness to his secret was dead, but the guilt he kept hidden away began to fester.

In a fit of anguish, his head seemed to burst open, and he experienced a stunning white light, and, he told me, “suddenly I had inner knowing.” That inner knowing included long passages of text that he later identified as parts of the Christian bible. After friends in whom he attempted to confide accused him of doing drugs and being deranged, he said, “I finally decided to just trust my own experience instead of going crazy.”

Brian’s response to his experience was to plunge himself into a study of the great spiritual traditions, learning about the teachings of Jesus and other great spiritual teachers. He built a surgical suite in his offices, where all but the more lengthy surgeries could be performed in an environment created to minimize surgical trauma and maximize post-surgical healing. Brian and his surgical team wore brightly printed scrubs, and patients were invited to address everyone on a first-name basis. A large picture window looked out on a private garden, the room was filled with crystals, and calming music was played during surgery.

Brian told me that when he added “holistic approach” to his business card, he expected his medical colleagues to accuse him of going round the bend, but instead they began saying that he was “crazy like a fox,” cashing in on the New Age craze. “They stopped referring their patients to me,” he said, “but they continued to send their family.”

Brian remarried and stayed loyal to his awakening for some time. He closed his medical practice, as he had planned, and became involved in hospice work, which was a goal he had set after Spirit had shaken him awake. It was more than ten years later that I heard rumors that he and his wife had divorced and he had dropped out of sight. Perhaps it was his time for another dark night of the soul.

Al’s experience was oddly similar to Brian’s with its white-light vision and Christian scripture content. Al was a member of a motorcycle club, a euphemism for the motorcycle gangs that flourished among young men searching for camaraderie and a personal sense of power and belonging. As a real-deal mechanical genius, he easily carved out a position of value within the club with his skill at motorbike repair and a talent for

designing and sewing the leathers that the riders wore. At first Al denied the questionable activity of some of his club brothers, then simply turned a blind eye to it. But the ugliness of the truth eventually caught up with him when he witnessed a gut-wrenching act of violence.

Fearing for his life if he simply walked away, Al began to have sleepless, nightmare-filled nights. He couldn't see a way out, and one evening drove out into the countryside, sat on the side of a hill, and placed a revolver in his mouth. A great rushing noise surrounded him, and he found himself in a ball of intense white light. The air was churning with pages that looked to be torn from a book, and when he looked at them, they were filled with bible verses. Unlike Brian, the words were familiar to him from his childhood years attending Sunday School at a little neighborhood church, where his minister emphasized the importance of scripture and handed out prizes to reward the children for memorizing bible verses.

The next thing he knew, he was awakened by the sun coming up over the horizon, and the revolver, with its bullets still in the chamber, was at his side. He rode to his mother's, where he slept, prayed, and searched the bible for answers. God had intervened in his suicide, he told me, and strengthened with that belief, returned to his club and, without embellishment, told them he had been born again and that the Lord had instructed him to leave the club and devote his life to Christ. With grateful and astonished surprise, he accepted their unexpected good wishes, revved up his Harley and began a new life.

Al married twice, divorced twice, and had four children. When I met him, he had a disabling marijuana habit and had not seen the young children from his second marriage in several years. Among his friends and neighbors, he was known as a kind and generous person who often gave of his time to those who needed an old car repaired or a patch on their roof. Once, he said, he saw a homeless man on the street that he recognized as an angel, and he gave him his guitar. That was the closest Al came to again experiencing a feeling of the presence of God in his life.

I propose that the emotional response to crises creates a powerhouse of emotional energy that opens the heart to spiritual truth. Strong emotions create the focus required to etch positive change into our daily lives. For some, the change is temporary; for others it marks the beginning of a new and more meaningful life path.

Quaker writers nearly always mention the goal and earmark of mystical experience is the fruit it yields, its "social utility," as Hedstrom put it (sec. II, para. 5). Quaker Howard Brinton wrote that *ethical mysticism* is communion with God followed by a commitment to serve the world.

Elam also found this spirit of altruism among her research subjects: “For many people, the experience of union with God is the beginning of a journey back into the world to do that work which is now both God’s and their own.” This confirms my own observation that the mystical experience inspires gratitude and a strong desire to participate in the creation of a better world. The good behavior is not a bargaining chip or pay back for a Divine favor. It is a deeply felt desire borne from the mystical experience, as if the experiencer had been inoculated with Divine Love.

I am reminded that George Fox’s vision on Pendle Hill was a classic case of emotional breakthrough and a classic case of follow-through. From that point forward, his God antenna was up and working, and he never flagged in his determination to build a new religion based on truth.

Born or Made?—Nature v. Nurture

Is it in the DNA or in the effort? Are mystics born with a gift for mysticism or developed through a disciplined approach or practice?

Most writers on mysticism suggested that the ability to engage the Divine is inherent, though often (or usually) undeveloped. Yungblut wrote: “The mystical faculty, whether developed or not, resides in all men and women by virtue of our shared humanity” (p. 11). Underhill, though consistently adamant on the connection between a genius gift and mysticism, wrote of a “natural mysticism . . . that is latent in man” (p. 13).

The first thought that came to my mind as I pondered the question was Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner proposed that the usual general intelligence tests overlook some specific types of intelligence. Originally naming seven intelligences, his list has expanded to nine: Visual/Spatial, Verbal/Linguistics, Mathematical/Logical, Bodily/Kinesthetic, Musical/Rhythmic, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, Naturalist, and Existentialist. According to Gardner’s theory, each of us is a unique combination of these intelligences.

The second thought that occurred to me was a statement made by David Bayles and Ted Orland in their classic *Art and Fear*: “Even talent is rarely distinguishable, over the long run, from perseverance and lots of hard work.”

So which of these concepts could be applied to mysticism? Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences that implies that each of us is born with a package of special gifts that in some way sets us apart from others or Bayles’s and Orland’s assertion that practice makes perfect, that putting in the work is as good as being born with the gift?

What I have always found appealing about Gardner’s theory is that it allows people to be differently gifted, rather than more or less gifted. Jones, champion of the common

person as mystic, seemed to agree with this judgment—at least so far as it applies to mysticism—when he wrote in 1930:

It is not easy to tell why some persons are so much better organs of the life of God than others are. Perhaps, however, it is no more mysterious than is the fact that some substances are vastly better conductors of electricity than others are.
(*Some Exponents*, p. 54)

I agree with Jones, and I suspect that both perseverance and native talent are at work in creating a mystic. A “great mystic” may be one who is born with a gift and works to perfect it, or maybe even someone who had practiced the skill with intense effort over a long period of time . . . and if they are judged by the Quaker measuring stick, they are also contributing mightily to the betterment of the human condition.

This leaves room for lesser mystics, I should think—good ones and pretty good ones and just ordinary ones. I can’t imagine a category of “not very good.” Living in the knowledge of the presence of God may hopefully one day become ordinary, but I cannot see it ever being “not very good.”

“The Mystic Way”: The Path of Spiritual Practice

For so long, I have associated a *practice* with daily yoga or meditation or a combination of the two. These practice forms have dropped in and out of my life over the past fifty years. My prayer of gratitude is the only practice that has consistently endured, becoming so entirely a part of my life that I rarely take a bite of anything without my ritual prayer. It’s brief, complete, and from the heart—and I have the opportunity to practice it three times a day most days.

Until I began this search for a definition of “mystic,” I had not given any thought to following any particular practice for the conscious purpose of finding my way towards what seemed to be already magnetically pulling me in its direction. For a few years I practiced Transcendental Meditation (TM)—a twice daily 20-minute discipline that involved chanting a mantra—until a gaggle of changes conspired to disrupt my ordered life.

Some years later, I undertook an experiment to see if I could reduce my sleeping time. I began taking a 15-minute nap every four hours, working towards a goal to omit the longer period of sleep at night. Not being a napper by habit, the challenge for me was to clear my mind of busyness as rapidly as possible and reach a sleep state. I used the old trick of progressively relaxing my body, beginning with my toes and ending with the ends of my hair. At the same time, I would chant over and over: “I am falling into a deep and peaceful sleep. When I awaken I will feel relaxed, refreshed, and rested.”

I never succeeded at achieving a sleep state in 15 minutes, nor did I achieve my ultimate goal to essentially eliminate nighttime sleep, but I did reduce it to six hours of deep, refreshing rest. It occurred to me, after the fact, that my relaxation practice was a variation of my earlier meditation practice. I gave up the project when my business became too demanding to allow me the luxury of leaving my office during the course of my workday.

One day in December 2002, near the dawning of an Australian summer, I hiked up the steep hill from my apartment building to the local Quaker meetinghouse. It was a fitting metaphor and the beginning of a new experience of the Divine. I had not yet heard that Quakerism is a “mystical religion” when I began to feel “the presence in the midst.” A print of the painting by that name hung over the fireplace in the worship room of the large 1919 Australian Federalist-style brick bungalow.

I suppose the worship room had been the living room when it had been the home of the well-to-do spinster—as they labeled single women in those days—who lived there from the time it was built until the Quaker meeting purchased it 43 years later. Across the wide entry hall, with its soaring ceiling, was the meeting’s library of nearly 2,000 books. The library must have originally been the parlor. It and the master bedroom were the only two rooms in the house that had lovely ceiling moulding and magnificent plaster ceiling roses. That beautiful room, ringed with shelves bursting with Quaker thought and experience, made almost as great a contribution to my growth in Quakerism as the meetings for worship . . . especially after I was invited to serve on the library committee. I was a cat locked in a catnip garden. Always there were a few books I was in the progress of reading, a short stack of books that I wanted to read, and a long list that I hoped to get around to some day. I was immersed in Quakerism.

I missed very few Sundays after that first trudge up Mount Lawley. Quaker meetings are brain trusts, as well as spiritual trusts, and I looked forward to every hour of worship and every hour of tea and biscuits that followed. When I read Robert Barclay’s words, they mirrored my experience:

. . . when I came into the silent assemblies of God’s people, I felt a secret power among them, which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me, and the good raised up. (Steele, p. 1)

I often experienced that of God among us, within us, and around us. And on a few occasions I came to know the meaning of a “covered meeting.”

Quaker meetings were providing me with another sort of practice—the deep, silent centering that constitutes an hour-long meeting for worship, as well as a shorter version at the beginning of other sorts of Quaker gatherings. Margery Post Abbott wrote

beautifully about just this sort of experience. She found that Meeting for Worship for Business was another place where “we practice being mystics.” She wrote: “As we do our corporate business, we learn and practice ways by which we can bring a sense of the Holy into everyday life—in short, how to live our faith” (p. 29).

Though my personal mystical events were infrequent, I was a member of a group mystical experience most Sundays for the eight years I attended Mount Lawley Recognised Meeting . . . only a short walk up a very steep hill.

Hanging out with Quakers and dipping into their written wisdom has added bits of discipline to my messy collection of practices that have gradually moved me into a more frequent connection with Spirit. In Beard I found advice on a positive attitude, which prepares the mind for physical and spiritual health, as well as a description of her own disciplined schedule of prayer and meditation to bring her into alignment with God’s will. The aging brain brings many gifts—I am much more adept at “the big picture”—but sometimes it’s a trade-off. I struggle to focus well enough to accomplish a deep meditative state, yet I continue to have my flashes of insight. Mostly they come as I wake in the morning or when I sit in worship with others.

Yungblut’s advice to “all Friends who are embarking on this venture of becoming a contemplative” reads with such urgent encouragement that I present it here complete:

. . . begin a disciplined study of the writings of the apostolic succession of Christian mystics, beginning with the great New Testament examples, Paul and John. These were an authentic company of experimentalists. We need to be familiar with the range and variety of mystics in the tradition. Not all of them will speak to everyone’s condition. But if we will stay with this discipline we will find companions along the way to guide and direct our path. Little by little we will recognize that we belong in this company, that they constitute for us “the cloud of witnesses,” and we will gradually discover what special kind of mystic each of us is. (*Speaking*, p. 22)

As a lover of books and a miner of fine minds, I’ve already begun to take that advice. But if that’s not your cup of tea, if you’re comfortable with your own serendipitous group of practices that doesn’t include long forays into difficult reading, then keep on keeping on. There are many “pathways to the reality of God,” Jones reminds us with his 1931 book title. We can take a sound and simple bit of counsel from TV’s leading pop psychologist, Dr. Phil: “Behave your way to success.”

Am I a Mystic?

Until I began to read *What Canst Thou Say?* I hadn't thought much about my experiences with the Divine as being mystical. I even thought of them as relatively common. Nearly everyone I spoke with had their own story of spiritual inspiration or intervention. I did discover, though, that having one such story was acceptable, having two or more was not. Temporary insanity happens to everyone now and again, but recurring insanity is a horse of a different color.

I am apparently not alone in not having given much thought to the mystic title. Jennifer Elam found that a significant number of her research subjects, while believing they had genuine mystical experiences, did not consider themselves mystics or had not thought about calling themselves mystics. Others held the title in awe, while still others embraced the notion of being a mystic. Without ever representing myself as such, I think I may have begun to think of myself as a mystic at some point after I began hobnobbing with others who had mystical experiences, and were equally hungry as I was to talk about them without being knighted with that other label that is often assigned to us: *Whacko*.

There is a kind of mysticism that can only be granted as a sort of sainthood, after death, by a grateful many. Then there is that simpler mysticism that can be claimed by any who know in their soul they have been visited by God.

I think I can call myself a mystic, though certainly not a "great mystic." History reserves the right to assign such magnificent titles. I am just someone who experiences the spiritual presence that some have named God and hopefully am a better person for it, a person who serves the community of human beings in ways that make life more meaningful and joyful . . . one person at a time.

Some mystics are born to the experience, some come to it through diligent practice, and others are scared into it. I suppose I would consider myself to have experienced all three avenues. I remember that feeling of certainty of the Divine from my earliest memories; in adulthood I rediscovered the connection during a time of great stress; and because of Wayne's queries and my attempts to address them through my recent reading, I have a deeper understanding of the value of an intentional practice.

I do not aspire to the Ecstasy, only to a life of purpose and servitude to Divine will. I have chosen Quakers to accompany me on my journey. As Yungblut wrote:

We [as Quakers] are the inheritors of a mystical faith. And we are, all of us, born mystics, whether or not we have yet been concerned to cultivate the faculty that God has given us, the faculty that constitutes in us his continuing creation, even its evolving edge in man. God grant that we may aspire to become contemplatives right where we are, here "where one stands," you and I!
(*Quakerism*, p. 23)

I feel immense gratitude for Wayne's questions. Looking for answers has truly disturbed my life—booting me another league down my path.

Writing about our experiences will never be adequate. Mysticism as union with God is beyond words—but we try.

My Reading List

The following are books, articles, pamphlets, and e-publications that I have read and that have contributed to my thinking on mystics, mysticism, and the mystical experience. I am not going to attempt to summarize them, but I have added an occasional note.

Abbott, Margery Post, Mary Ellen Chijioke, Pink Dandelion, and John William Oliver Jr. *Historical Dictionary of the Friends (Quakers)*. Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements Series. Scarecrow Press, 2012.

Abbott, Margery Post. *Quaker Views on Mysticism*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 375. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 2005.

Beard, Rebecca. *Everyman's Search*. Bala-Cynwyd, PA: Merrybrook Press, 1950.

Beard, Rebecca. *Everyman's Goal*. Wells, VT: Merrybrook Press, 1951.

Beard, Rebecca. *Everyman's Mission*. Los Angeles: Scrivener, 1952.

Benson, Lewis. *"That of God in Every Man"—What Did George Fox Mean by It?* Alfreton, Derbyshire, UK: New Foundation Fellowship, 2001. (Originally published 1970)

Boehme, Jakob (translated by Michael L. Birkel and Jeff Bach). *Genius of the Transcendent: The Mystical Writings of Jakob Boehme*. Boston & London: Shambhala, 2010.

Brinton, Howard H. *Ethical Mysticism in the Society of Friends*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 156. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1967.

Carroll, Kenneth. *Touched by God in Quaker Meeting*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 338. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1998. [This collection of true stories of Spirit's palpable presence in Quaker meetings is simply uplifting. I have it close at hand where

I can pick it up anytime I need to be reminded that God's in his heaven and all's right with the world.]

Crom, Scott. *Obstacles to Mystical Experience*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 132. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1963.

Elam, Jennifer. *Dancing with God Through the Storm: Mysticism & Mental Illness*. Media, PA: Way Opens Press, 2002. [Unique in the areas of psychology, mystical studies, and Quaker studies, I heartily recommend Jennifer's academically sound and very important contribution to literature on mysticism.]

Finn, Charles C. *John Yungblut: Passing the Mystical Torch*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 417. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 2012.

Flinders, Carol Lee. *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1993.

Flory, Jim. "Quakerism as Contemplative Practice," http://www.jflory.org/contemplative_quaker/qk_cont.htm (accessed 10 February 2015).

Gould, Helen. *The Quaking Meeting: Transforming Our Selves, Our Meetings and the More-than-Human World*. The James Backhouse Lecture 2009. Australia Yearly Meeting, 2009.

Hedstrom, Matthew S. "Rufus Jones and Mysticism for the Masses," *Crosscurrents*, <http://www.corsscurrents.org/Hedstrom0204.htm> (accessed 7 August 2014). [Hedstrom has written a revealing portrait of Rufus Jones's place in bringing a modern religion to a mass audience and his underlying, direct influence on the more famous names of his day.]

Hodgkin, David. *Quakerism: A Mature Religion for Today*. Address to Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia, Sydney, 1971. [This is an excellent discussion of modern Quakerism in the unprogrammed tradition. A "North American" edition is available on the Internet at <http://universalistfriends.org/hodgkin.html>.]

Huffman, Max Eugene. *Revelations of the Holy: An Autobiography*. (Ebook pdf) Lulu Publishing, 2010.

Inge, William Ralph. *Christian Mysticism: Considered in Eight Lectures Delivered before the University of Oxford*. The Bampton Lectures, 1899. London: Methuen & Company, 1899. (Available on the Internet as Project Gutenberg eBook #14596 at <https://archive.org/stream/christianmystici4596gut/14596.txt>)

Jones, Rufus Matthew. *Some Exponents of Mystical Religion*. New York/Cincinnati/Chicago: Abingdon Press, 1930. [Jones is such an excellent writer and so accessible. I have Nixon Orwin Rush's bibliography of Jones's work and hope to read my way through his entire opus. I am unashamedly a loud voice in his Amen corner.]

Jones, Rufus Matthew. *Religion as Reality, Life and Power*. William Penn Lecture 1919. <http://www.quaker.org/pamphlets/wpl1919p.html> (accessed 12 June 2014).

Liem, Ann. *Jacob Boehme: Insights into the Challenge of Evil*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 214. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1977. [Reading Jacob Boehme is a prodigious undertaking. Liem has done a wonderful job of selecting and editing pieces that represent his life's work.]

Olmstead, Sterling. *Motions of Love: Woolman as Mystic and Activist*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 312. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1993.

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). *The Question of God*, "Other Voices: Evelyn Underhill," <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/voices/underhill.html> (accessed 16 June 2014).

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). *This Far by Faith*, "People of Faith: Howard Thurman," http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/howard_thurman.html (accessed 2 March 2015).

State University of New York at Cortland. "*Multiple Intelligence (MI) — Howard Gardner*," <http://web.cortland.edu/andersmd/learning/MI%20Theory.htm> (accessed 25 February 2015)

Steere, Douglas V. *Friends and Worship*. <http://www.fgcquaker.org/sites/www.fgcquaker.org/files/attachments/Steere%20on%20Worship.pdf> (accessed 5 March 2015).

Taylor, Jill Bolte. *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*. New York: Viking, 2006. [What's it like when your brain stops working but you still have a sense of being, a sense of living in a sea of love? Jill Bolte Taylor came back from the abyss and was able to write about it. Wow!]

Thomas, G. Ernest. *Six 20th Century Mystics*. Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1955.

Thurman, Howard. *Mysticism and the Experience of Love*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 115. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1961. [Thurman was Rufus Jones's student, as well as an incredibly talented writer, and a potent force for good. Here he beautifully presents a case for forgiveness and love as the answer to the world's problems. All his books are now on my to-read list.]

Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2002. ("an unabridged, unaltered republication of the twelfth edition [1930] published by E. P. Dutton and Company, of the work originally published in 1911").

Vining, Elizabeth Gray. *William Penn: Mystic*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 167. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1969.

Wilson, Leslie Owen. *The Second Principle: The Work of Leslie Owen Wilson, Ed.D.*, "The Ninth Intelligence: Existential or Cosmic Smarts." 2015, <http://thesecondprinciple.com/optimal-learning/ninth-intelligence-existential-cosmic-smarts-2/> (accessed 3 Mar 2015).

Yungblut, John. *Speaking as One Friend to Another: On the Mystical Way Forward*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 249. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1983.

Yungblut, John. *Quakerism of the Future: Mystical, Prophetic and Evangelical*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 194. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1974.

Reflections on Mysticism and Mystical Experience

by Jennifer Elam

In 1652, during the early years of the Quakers, George Fox claimed to have had a vision while on top of Pendle Hill:

As we travelled, we came near a very great hill, called Pendle Hill, and I was moved of the Lord to go up to the top of it; which I did with difficulty, it was so very steep and high. When I was come to the top, I saw the sea bordering upon Lancashire. From the top of this hill the Lord let me see in what places he had a great people to be gathered. — George Fox: An Autobiography, Chapter 6

I often say I feel like the most blessed woman in the world. Writing for the What Canst Thou Say (WCTS) Proceedings brings that feeling. Thank you for the invitation!

I was asked to address the following questions in a broad and general way. What is the definition of a mystic? Who should be called a mystic? How did you come to the decision to undertake your research for your book, *Dancing with God through the Storm: Mysticism and Mental Illness*? Who did you talk to? What conclusions did you reach? How have these conclusions changed or seasoned with time? How has your view of mysticism and mystics evolved since you completed your research and wrote your book over a decade ago?

It is a beautiful sunny fall day and I am outside taking in the beauty of nature. Nature mysticism and appreciating God's work in the color of leaves is a magnificent and important form of mysticism and very important to many of us.

Introduction

My first recollection of hearing the word *mysticism* was in an adult religious education forum shortly after I had begun attending Berea Friends Meeting in Kentucky. I was brand new to Quakerism. In graduate school, a dear friend had said to me, "Jennifer, YOU are a Quaker." I blew him off because I had no idea what that meant. But, a seed had been planted. Soon after graduation from UNC, I moved back to Kentucky and my neighbor invited me to Quaker meeting. I went. At that first meeting, I heard Carol sing "How Can I Keep From Singing." In the ensuing silence, I knew I was home in a way I had never been before.

I started consuming all that was available about these newfound F(f)riends. On one particular Sunday during a religious education forum, when the discussion began about

Quaker mysticism and Quakerism as a mystical religion, I had no background for understanding. The discussion evolved into a discussion about God. Most of the participants described their understandings “about God.” Two of us talked about our “relationship WITH God.” Since early childhood, I have felt the presence of God in my life and that is very different from studying about God as I had done in religion classes in college. The group said, “You two are mystics.” My reaction was, “Oh no, not me.” I had heard in the religion of my youth that mysticism was from the devil. And I was a psychologist so I certainly did not have positive connotations from my profession. But a seed was again planted and this discussion came back to me repeatedly as I needed it later.

Also, soon after beginning Quaker meeting, I was opened to new realms of reality. Then for over a decade, I had out-of-the-ordinary experiences of God and spiritual realities. Again, the two frames I had were “the devil had got a holt o me,” or I was having a psychotic break. Neither of those frames fit.

At that time, Parker Palmer was a Lily Professor at Berea College and joined Berea meeting. I had no idea he was a famous guy or I would not have had the nerve, but I asked him many times if I could sit and talk with him about the messages he gave in meeting that were amazing to me and spoke to me deeply. During that time, he began to encourage me to go to Pendle Hill. I was a dancer back then and was going to a dance week end at Cape May, New Jersey, from Kentucky. I decided to check this Pendle Hill place out. I was intrigued. Almost as soon as I got home from my trip, the dean, Janet Shepherd, called and invited me to be a summer intern at Pendle Hill to study and report back on what communities throughout the northeast similar to Pendle Hill were doing. What a summer! My heart was stolen. In 1996–97, I rented out my house and took a leave from my job. I felt called to the Contemplative Living and Prayer year of the School of the Spirit being held at Pendle Hill. I was resistive but learned anyways about mystics and desert fathers (topics I knew nothing about). By 1998, I had sold my house and quit my job. I felt called to accept an offer to be Cadbury scholar at Pendle Hill and research my topic of emerging interest—Mysticism and Mental Illness.

Pendle Hill

A point of real transformation came with two gatherings of Quaker mystics at Pendle Hill in the fall of 1996 and again in the spring of 1998. I had an oversight committee from my meeting in Kentucky that served as a clearness committee when I decided I wanted to go to Pendle Hill. That committee stayed with me for 12 years and was always interested in supporting and providing accountability for the things I did. I am so grateful

to them. They literally stayed with me until two of them died. Support and accountability are crucial elements for the spiritual life!

When I attended the gathering of the Quaker mystics in 1996, as a psychologist I wanted to diagnose all kinds of disorders I thought I was seeing. But as a child of God, I felt like I had entered a banquet, a Thanksgiving feast. My brain felt like it was shorting out because of the contrast of understandings from the psychological and the mystical. And both were true! In the spring of 1998, my clearness committee from Kentucky came to Pendle Hill and met with my clearness committee that I had formed at Pendle Hill. I was experiencing support like I had never felt before. Sitting with those two committees felt most like eating good chocolate-covered strawberries; I wanted the flavor to cover my whole face. That support felt like the mothering of God and was a feeling I wanted to cover my whole being and my whole life. During that year of 1997–98, as the Pendle Hill Cadbury scholar, I interviewed over 100 people for the research that led to the Pendle Hill Pamphlet (1999) and the book (2002): *Dancing with God through the Storm: Mysticism and Mental Illness*.

The interviewees were volunteers. I placed three ads in Quaker resources: a bulletin that Pendle Hill was publishing at that time, *Friends Journal*, and *Friends Bulletin* on the west coast. More people responded than I could possibly interview. I found people hungry to talk about their experiences in a place they thought might be relatively safe.

Reflections on Past Research on Mysticism and Mental Illness

Definitions

The most honest answer I can give to the question of “What is the definition of a mystic?” is that I do not know. But also that I do not feel that I need to know. I am most interested in helping people find the support they need to integrate their experiences, whatever they might be labeled. I also took this stance as a psychologist. Psychologists are tied to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual—most recently in its fifth edition. I have heard in my professional life that the categories help with communication. I have personally found them at least as much a hindrance as a help. Going to the heart of the experience—of whatever sort—rather than focusing on labeling it, has worked more effectively for me.

In using the word *mysticism*, it seems like more of a head/academic discussion. In using the term *mystical experience*, I feel like I am talking more about actual people with actual experiences in their bodies. I tend to use the word *mystic* very little because I don’t know how to identify a mystic other than by self-definition. Many people have mystical experiences; when they become mystics is not something I know.

In my research, I started out thinking I would use a classic definition used by the traditional experts like Evelyn Underhill, who wrote extensively on the topic, and find people who fit that definition. It did not work like that. People started telling me about their mystical experiences and parts might have fit part of the definition but never exactly.

Then I looked at the work of highly esteemed Quaker Howard Brinton and learned about three kinds of mysticism as he saw the definitions: passionate, nature, and ethical mysticism. Passionate mysticism includes those experiences of communion or union with God that involve a deeply personal experience of what is often referred to as Christ's "passion," especially his crucifixion or resurrection. Julian of Norwich was a passionate mystic. Nature mysticism was described as experiencing nature as a spiritual reality and not just a physical one. He calls this the oldest recorded mysticism. St. Francis was a nature mystic; many examples of mystical connections with animals and nature were recorded historically. Brinton described ethical mysticism as very important among Quakers. The ethical mystic applies their faith in practical or ethical ways as a direct result of the mystical experience. The ethical mystic

first withdraws from the world revealed by the senses to the inward Divine Source of Light, Truth, and Power, and then returns to the world with strength renewed, insight cleared, and desire quickened to bind all life together in the bonds of Love. These bonds are discovered by the process of withdrawal and return because the one inward Divine Source is itself the creative unity which seeks to bind all life together. (Howard H. Brinton, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 156, *Ethical Mysticism in the Society of Friends*)

I thought in doing my research I would find people who fit with Howard Brinton's definitions. In fact, some did. Others fit part of one and part of another (for example, part nature and part passionate). There are a lot of ethical mystics among Quakers who see their work in the world as a calling coming directly from a direct experience of God.

In the research, I asked each participant for their definition and accepted that. The best definition I can find to fit the research as a whole would be people having direct experiences of God/Light/Universal Love that gave them a sense of KNOWING a bigger reality than the physical reality of the senses that our culture would have us believe is the only reality. The experiences become integrated in a way that makes the person want to serve. The actual experiences were quite varied and I refer you to the book for a taste of that. I also need to say that I did not address all of mental illness, only those in which an experience of God was involved.

Highlights of the Research

It all has purpose. After about five years of trying to understand my own experiences, on April 14, 1998, I was walking down Plush Mill Road and heard, “It all has purpose.” That is perhaps one of my most important experiences, bolstering my faith through all kinds of storms in life. Most recently as I engaged with breast cancer, that voice came back to me over and over. My journey with breast cancer became a powerful spiritual experience as I diligently sought what greater purpose could be being served. Now and for over a year now, daily I deal with incredibly intense and horrid chronic pain believed to be nerve pain from neuropathy as a result probably of cancer treatments. That has been harder than the breast cancer and is not resolved, so I cannot yet look back on it and say, “Here is where I found purpose in my life,” but I sense it. I often sense something big and good coming my way. I call it my “whoosh” coming. So far, I have not become depressed and I attribute it to faith garnered from this simple experience (possibly defined as mystical) of the still small voice.

Depression and other mental disorders. Many of the over 100 people I interviewed had suffered from mental disorders, most often depression. Often the person had had an experience that they could not integrate and did not have the support they needed to do so. Some had encountered mental health professionals that did not have any knowledge of or training in mysticism.

I have not been diagnosed with mental disorders (probably because I did not seek help from professionals who did not know the territory). But in 1993, I had an experience that I think might be close to what some other people experience. In fact, I recently accompanied a close friend through a major depressive episode and her descriptions were very similar to this experience.

For three weeks, for the first time in my life, I could not feel the presence of God. I was in a black dark hole and could not find my way out. It was the most horrid experience of my life. I believe that during that time I was capable of ANYTHING to get out of that feeling. Reflecting back on it, it was also the most educational experience of my life. It taught me that given certain circumstances, I could be a drug addict, a criminal, or any other of the lifestyles I have never understood. Knowing that I am capable of those acts took away judgment of others in powerful ways.

Many other people have told me their stories of how their mystical experiences have helped them transcend their traumas, abuses, and other powerful struggles that might come from the outside or from the inside (self-loathing is often at the root of fear and mental disorders).

Power of Stories. How one frames and develops the story of their experiences of God is so important in determining whether and how the experience will serve them. One

thing that has changed in the past decade is the willingness and readiness of people to share the stories of their out-of-the-ordinary and beyond-the-senses experiences. Lori Perman, past director of Pendle Hill, told me that she thought my book came out ahead of its time. She might be right. I know that in the past decade the mainstream culture (and even some practitioners of psychology) has become more open to realities beyond the senses. Just in the past week, two people voluntarily shared their stories with me. In my research, most of the people told me they had never talked about their experiences with anyone. So framing and telling the stories are important for the integration of the experiences into one's life. Finding meaning and integrating that into one's spiritual journey is critical to a good outcome.

I will share Harold and Susan's stories with you here. Harold works as a teacher's assistant in the public schools. Susan is a retired high school teacher who spent her life in theater and is now a poet.

Harold's Story

In the summer of 1991, I was living in a somewhat rundown white ranch house in northern California, Trinidad, to be precise. That fall, I had fallen in love with the town as I entered my elementary studies at Humboldt State. The panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean and the rugged headlands reaching into the sky like a giant's rocky fingers seemed to fill something in me, seemed to answer a question which had burned in me all my young adult life. The previous fall had been the happiest time of my young adult life, with interesting classes, wild and eccentric new friends, and vibrant young women who were interested in me. As each day began, I would begin each day standing out on the small stoop of the house I shared with my first roommate, drinking coffee and relishing the view of the ocean. Life was now an adventure and I had felt as if I were living in a book, a book I could help author each glorious day. As the months passed and I drifted into a largely unplanned summer, the challenges of living 3,000 miles away from my family and all my old friends asserted themselves with ever more urgency. I learned the difficulties of finding a job in an economically depressed area, with many young people vying for the same jobs. A roommate's father decided to settle an old score with her by smashing my stereo system and piercing holes in my speakers. How could things change so quickly and so much for the worst? Eventually, I moved into a different house, sharing it with an aging hippie and writer.

As the summer moved forward with a molasses-like, agitated quality, I was let go from my job at the local restaurant, the Seascap. I struggled to fill shapeless days with volunteering, exercising, and helping a friend with his map-making business in Arcata, but the center never seemed to hold. My efforts to build a stable structure seemed to slip through my hands like a slippery eel, and I gradually became more and more depressed. Having a third roommate who had an untreated drinking problem move in added to the weight I felt myself carrying. The more depressed I became, the more I prayed. With visits from my parents and a childhood friend shining like beacons in a grey mist, I made it to the end of the summer. One night I took a walk into the state park which bordered our property, looking up at the trees and the stars. In the flash of a moment, everything changed. I felt a tremendous light, love, and energy pouring into me and the same forces pouring out of me, I into it and it into me. I was a part of my surroundings now, connected with the world as never before. The next night, I took another walk and had the same experience. At one of the darkest times in my life, the light had been revealed to me in the most profound and electrifying way. There was another reality in my world, a reality so large and powerful, a reality which was fundamentally about love. It changed me. I have been seeking connection with that love and power ever since, and believe I always will be.

Susan's Story

Mysticism
Mystic River
Mystic, Connecticut
Mystical
Mysterious
Mystery

There is no magic in these words applied so widely. Was Mystic, CT named after a divine mystical experience? What of Mystic River? I can imagine a river being mystical—as in self-aware of existence on more than one plane that is accessible—when its garbage is out of the way. I would imagine that for a river this would occur closest to its source.

I have read about famous mystics and have read work by famous mystics—those who were natural or religiously inspired or induced by

peyote: Carlos Castaneda, Kahlil Gibran, Omar Khayyam, Rumi, Gurdjieff, Starhawk and Susan Griffin, Hildegard, St. Francis, Meister Eckhart, William Blake, Whitman, Jesus and lots of Quakers and poets and Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance and also Archery. I imagine the Bible was written by mystic types whether they knew it or not. I suppose that priests have access and awareness whether or not they use them.

But I never noticed that I myself had mystical experience until I had my first few experiences as a Quaker. After that I could look back over my life and question experiences I had before I knew the concept of mysticism. And I still wonder if by its very nature the Religious Society of Friends—Quakers—is a mystical faith. Does having mystical experiences make someone a mystic?

I first met Quakers when part of the planning collective for the Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice in the early 1980s. It wasn't long before I started attending worship with them at Albany Friends Meeting, attracted by two Quakers—a mother and daughter team—who always saw the positive in each situation and smiled while others frowned and struggled. One day while sitting in Meeting for Worship, I thought I was mind-wandering because my eyes were open and I was looking at each individual in our circle. Their outlines began to blur until I saw blobs of flesh stuffed into clothes with facial features and long stringy arms and legs. What the Hell? But I wasn't mind-wandering. As I squeezed my eyes open and shut to shake free my vision, I heard—maybe—what was a voice saying: “ See? People are all made of the same stuff, but they are shaped differently with different skills to do different tasks. So if one of you does it, you all do it—no need for competitiveness or jealousy.” That took some unpacking. It was months before I told anyone.

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Reflection 1: It is possible that my experience and conclusions have nothing to do with mysticism, that if I had never felt alienated I would know they were merely what humans have available to them daily. But as a Quaker, I experience other people's recounting of their experience and therein I hear enough AWE to know these experiences are about our relationship with God.

Reflection 2: Everyone has access to spiritual relationship with God, but few dare to follow. Isn't that odd? To have access to Joy and to refuse it? But some of the Passion is of the Burning-Bush variety, and—say what you might—few people want to go that far from their comfort zone. The ones that do are the subject of books, and I am not one of those. Not yet. (for more of Susan's wonderful writing, here is the link to her blog: <http://susan60.blogspot.com/2014/11/free-writing-with-jen-thinking-about.html>)

Conclusions from the Past Research: Street Lights in the Dark

What conclusions did you reach in your research? How have these conclusions changed or seasoned with time? The following are all conclusions that have stood the tests of time and seasoning since the research was done. I call these street lights in the dark.

- God is available in everything – not just the sweet spring flowers but also the storms and volcanoes of life.
- People want and need to talk about their experiences; they need places that feel and are safe to do so.
- It is important to be careful who you talk to about out-of-the-ordinary experiences of God.
- People are opened to bigger realities in many different ways; there is not just one right way.
- We need support and accountability as we go through openings of various sorts. Accompaniment is a word that I borrowed from the peace teams that go to foreign countries. The word fits what people said they needed.
- The common understanding is that there is a fine line between mystical experiences and mental illness; that hypothesis did not hold up. The same experiences can be seen as one or the other depending on many variables other than the experience itself.
- Experiences with great potential to be a gift to the experiencer can be very uncomfortable and unpleasant at the time.
- Fear, self-loathing, and the lack of a supportive community are important factors that make the experience more likely to be called mental illness.
- Some agreement emerged among participants as to what had been helpful to them along the way in understandings and in direct support:

- Help to find words and frameworks for the experience that normalize and frame the experiences as containing gifts (even those that don't feel good will eventually contain a gift). Spiritual traditions of many kinds can provide that frame; those of indigenous peoples and shamanistic traditions are being explored for the support they provide;
- A strong "container" is needed. Some find that container in their own hearts, their journals, and/or their relationships with something bigger than themselves. They have an understanding of the experience that works for them. Others find containment in their spiritual/faith communities who validate a sense of "calling." Others are helped by the medical communities. Many report harm being done by both traditional religious and medical establishments that do not value the experiences.
- A distinction between the bodily experiences and the conceptualization can be helpful. Often the misery comes not from the actual bodily experience but from the fears provoked by thoughts of what the experience might mean (e.g., Am I going crazy?).
- When there is a stage of misery, people need validation that their psychic pain is real. Rest and separation from the world may be needed for a while but as soon as possible, a place needs to be found where the experiencer can serve a positive role in the world.
- Sometimes the pain experienced is the clean pain of an egg breaking open and is pain to be felt; not fixed. When understood in this way, the pain becomes more bearable.
- Experiencers need other people to be honest in specific ways. Feedback is needed when realities do not match, but not by denying the experiencer's reality or calling it delusional. Each person needs to be able to state their reality without anyone being wrong.
- A major task of experiencers is to find their own center and grounding; that has to come from within. Calling one's reality delusional keeps the person from being able to rebuild trust in their own center.
- Recognize that words are inadequate to the task of communicating about mystical experiences. Using creative arts, movement and writing can often reach the place from where the words come

when words are inadequate. Language is only a representation of experience but creates its own reality.

- Many experience a powerful “energy” along with their mystical experience that needs to be directed toward constructive creative outlets or is at risk of becoming destructive.
- Other more direct support needed includes:
 - A safe place to tell their stories with all the paradoxes and be respected;
 - To feel safe that they are not going to be called crazy, discounted, or put down;
 - For many, unresolved trauma, recent losses, or both emerged needing treatment;
 - Many have not been able to find their authentic voices in the world that demands conformity; this breaking open is a necessary step to breaking through some kind of block—the value of that process needs acceptance.
 - Help dealing with the outside world; the opened sensitivity makes the violence of the world magnified. Television and even the news may become unbearable.
 - Help to recognize that moment when it is time to go back into the world in a new way; resources for doing so are often needed. A new way of functioning is emerging.
 - To find normalizing rather than pathologizing frameworks for the experience; how the experiences are framed helps to CREATE further experience.
 - To be with others who do not need to believe or disbelieve the stories; help is needed to find one’s own voice amidst the possible chaos;
 - Transcending dualities such as sick/well, psychotic/spiritual that are not helpful is important. Experiences are often both/and rather than either/or in nature.
 - Help to be in one’s body in loving ways; the body often becomes the target of hate and fear and it just needs big love.

Persons having mystical experiences need to be supported to integrate their experiences into their spiritual life, giving them meaning.

Summary

I embarked on my research because I was seeking to understand experiences I had had and to find better frames for them, though I could not have articulated that then. It was more like a vague calling that I knew I had to follow. I talked with many volunteers, most were Quakers and some were not. Many of the conclusions that I came to over a decade ago still stand in the understandings I have today. In defining who is a mystic, I leave that up to the person to embrace that word or not. One change I have observed in the last decade is that the wider culture is more open to hearing about spiritual realms of reality, so people are more willing to share their stories and embrace the words *mystical experience*. How the stories are created and told is critical to creating an outcome in which the gift can shine.

When a person has an experience of an opening to consciousness of a bigger reality, often they become fearful and that fear can make the experience unpleasant. The fear is often a response to their own thoughts based on common frameworks available in our culture. When one's consciousness is opened, if there is unresolved grief and/or trauma, they may be opened to that as well as higher consciousness, and that can cause fear. Therapy may be needed; a therapist familiar with and trained in working in this territory is hard to find but important; otherwise, they can do harm by increasing the fear. What the person likely needs has been articulated by experiencers (above)—most important, a community of people who can frame the experience as having great potential for gifts to shine and who can provide support and accountability. For me, it seems that this is enough to take all the energy and resources available, and there is not a lot left for spending time trying to label the experience as mystical or not. As an experiencer, it did not occur to me to care whether or not my experience would be called mystical. I also did not have one participant in my research tell me that it was important to them to have the right label for their experience (other than to know they were not going crazy). Support and accompaniment was the overwhelming need and that continues to be reported a decade later.

Suggested Beyond-Quaker Resources

- American Center for the Integration of Spiritually Transformative Experiences is an organization in California that is doing research in this area, certifying therapists, and having annual conferences.
- Psychosis/Spirituality e-list (let me know if you want to participate: jenelam@aol.com). This is a forum for experiencers and professionals to converse. I have followed this

conversation since the e-list began after a conference I attended in England in 2003. Chris and Isabel Clarke are moderators.

What Canst Thous Say? (*WCTS*) is a worship-sharing group in print for Quakers with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. Our Internet home is <http://whatcanstthousay.org>