

MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 13

WHEN WAS A TIME THAT YOUR BODY HELPED YOU SEE THE LIGHT?

I have often felt a motion of love to leave some hints in writing of my experience of the Goodness of *God*.

John Woolman

Lightness

Last September my children, a neighbor and I were outside in the front yard when we heard shots fired half a block away. We have always felt very safe in our neighborhood, so at first we didn't know what had happened. Minutes later, police cars careened down our street and parked at the corner, where they remained until long into the night. We later found out it was a gang-related drive-by; neither of the parties involved were from our neighborhood, no one was hurt, and everyone was caught.

My son, Oliver, was traumatized. He didn't want to play outside for fear of those people coming back to our street. He fretted about how close he and his friend had been when it happened and what if they had been playing down the street at another friend's house. He became afraid of the dark because of what he couldn't see in it. He was afraid to close his eyes because every time he did he was haunted by the sounds of gunshots. At bedtime each night, he begged me to stay with him and talk. He asked questions, late into the night, about who would do something like this and why. I didn't know what to do or how to help him, other than to reiterate that we were safe. I would lie in his bed holding

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him and praying that he would feel safe and be able to sleep. I mourned this small loss of my son's innocence and thought of the children who live in places where these events are a regular occurrence.


After a couple of nights of Oliver not being able to fall asleep until late and waking repeatedly with nightmares, we were both exhausted. I wrote to the prayer chain and asked for others to pray for a sense of calm and safety for him and, most of all, for sleep. That night, right after an early dinner, I believe the Light came to us. What we felt, however, was heavy darkness. It seemed as though all the

MINDING THE LIGHT is a bimonthly collection of stories from the lives of members and attenders of West Hills Friends, a Quaker meeting in Portland, Oregon. Among Quakers, "minding the Light" means noticing, listening for and paying heed to the voice of our Teacher.

Early Quakers kept journals about their relationship with God to share with the community. A well-known example is John Woolman's journal, which has been continually in print for more than 200 years. Quakers believe that the Light of Christ is in everyone and that God speaks to everyone, giving us all stories to tell. We hope to carry on the tradition of sharing stories about minding the Light by publishing them for our community and making them available to others on the web.

Each issue is organized around a query about minding the Light. Our writers speak from their own experience, not going beyond the measure of Light they've been given. We hope these stories will transform our way of seeing God and each other and that they will bring comfort to those who seek news of God's presence in the world.

prayers of our community met over the roof of our house, wove together and then descended upon us, enveloping us like a thick, weighty blanket, the kind that makes you feel warm and cozy. My body felt leaden and drowsy. Oliver looked at me and told me his body felt heavy and tired and wanted to go to bed right then.

He slept 13 hours that night and awoke the next day saying he felt light again and not scared anymore. 
 – BCW

Glow in the dark



– Photo by Margaret Kellermann 


[The windowsill saint is glowing from inside, at sunset. Her body is giving off light stored from the day.]

My Body is a Strict School Marm

Glasses halfway down her nose,
 Staring me down –
 No ruckus allowed! Nagging me.
 I repay her with all kinds of grief:
 the same currency she grants me.

I cartoon her chin wattle, her saggy arms,
 laughing at her wide behind. Caught,
 I’m banished to the Principal –
 Corporal re-education – a whacking!
 The old hag! I hate her! I know I do – but I –

I – love – her – yes – God, I do. In her I witness
 Mother Mary’s labor groaning, I see
 sweet Jesus lugging His cross uphill. Every dear saint’s
 eventual demise. I recall
 my body is the temple *shul* and

my beloved Rabbi, wonder teacher –
 Alpha and Omega’s outstretched arms
 opening the sacred scrolls,
 revealing God’s Eternal Light
 written deep in me. 
 – Claire Nail

Please Share Your Story

Our next Query: *When has minding the Light taken you "off the map?"*

Tell us a story about following the Light into a wilderness of any kind: about finding comfort, receiving guidance, being surprised by God when there was no path to lead you, or any other experience of trying to follow the Light in unfamiliar terrain.

We publish stories as told to the extent that they fit within our guidelines.

Story Deadline: 7/21/13

[Detailed guidelines at: www.mindingthelight.org]

Publication Guidelines

Your stories can be submitted in any publishable format: narratives, poetry, songs, art, other.

Word stories: must be 500 words or less, and written in the first person by a member or attender of West Hills Friends. Stories should be submitted in text format in the body of an email addressed to: office@westhillsfriends.org.

Original paintings, photos, and other art can be submitted on paper or emailed in JPG format.

Original music and videos should be submitted as links to websites like YouTube or Vimeo.

Sheer Faith

They told me not to look down...yet I felt compelled anyway. I didn't see a way up the almost sheer, nearly vertical rock face, so I looked down, hoping to see some way to move. That was a mistake.


I was just learning to rock climb as part of a mountaineering course offered by the Mazamas, a local group here in Portland. We'd driven to a butte in Washington to practice the skills we'd learned on easier terrain, and now here we were, climbing one at a time up a challenging wall.

In spite of being "on belay," I was still scared to the core. I'd ascended about 100 feet by finding tiny toeholds and cracks where my fingers inched in and held on for dear life. Ever so slowly, I'd find a handhold and then a place for my foot, hoping that it would hold my weight. I inched upward, bit by bit, but still had about 25 feet to go to reach the top.

Far below me, at the base, was a huge pile of jagged boulders, waiting, it seemed, to impale my body if I slipped and the rope gave way. For what seemed an eternity, I searched for my next move. Everything was sheer. Where there might be a tiny handhold, there was no place for my foot. I couldn't see a way forward, and panic started to seep in. People far below were waiting patiently

for me to make my next move, yet I couldn't move. I was frozen on the rock wall.

Then a verse from the Bible came to me. *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* I repeated this in my mind, and a peace seeped in. It says "all things," not "all things except rock climbing." "OK," I thought, "Christ's strength can get me through this." My concentration returned and the panic subsided. I saw the beauty of my surroundings, the incredible view from so high up. I reached out past a place that was slightly hidden from view and found my next move.

Each time I searched, I found a new handhold and a place for my foot. Bit by bit, I ascended. I was overjoyed...and so grateful...to reach the top and to have the gift of that verse. It's helped me many times since. 
 – Anne A



This paper is 100% Post-Consumer Recycled

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Not Another Step

When I went to visit Prague in 2002, I followed stories instead of streets. I followed the story of Rabbi Lowe's golem, the story of King Wenceslas, the story of Tycho Brahe's silver nose. I followed all the interwoven histories and legends of Prague. It made for lots of walking.

My apartment was in a fairly mundane section of Prague, where cement buildings were tagged with angry scribbles of graffiti. One night, as I was walking home, I felt a stabbing pain in my foot. I expected to find a nail – or perhaps something worse – protruding from the sole of my shoe. There was nothing. I tried to take another step, but the pain was unbearable. I tried shifting my weight to a different part of my foot. No matter what I tried, I was immobilized by pain.

It was night. I was a complete stranger to everyone around me. I had no way of getting home. I felt afraid. And then I felt betrayed. How could my body refuse such an elementary request? Step forward. One step forward! Is this too much to ask? I never asked my body to do anything heroic. In return, I expected my body to move my head from place to place without any fuss.


Years ago, I remember standing in a barn, watching all of my cousins jump from the hayloft

onto bales of hay down below. I stood there, poised to jump after them. Then, I noticed all the farm implements scattered around below me. My cousins were fearless, but I saw every sharp and rusty edge as the promise of harm. I decided not to jump. Neither athletic nor graceful, I knew that my body was not meant for such things. As a child, I ratified a solemn treaty with my body: it was the Peace of Low Expectations.

In Prague, I suffered a diplomatic incident with myself. Even my low expectations had been rejected. "Too much walking," said my body. My mind was incredulous: "Have you seen **Mission Impossible**? Because that sets the bar for amazing physical stunts in Prague. I'm just asking you to walk!" "Too much walking," my body insisted.

Eventually, the pain subsided. I was able to limp to my apartment. The next morning, I felt much better. But something very important had changed. Long-held treaties were back on the negotiating table. That was over 10 years ago, and my body has become ever more assertive. Now, I have to trim my eyebrows to keep hair from stabbing me in the eyes. My eyebrows!

Once, my body was willing to live quietly on the reservation. That lopsided treaty is broken

forever. As I grow older, my body has claimed a new authority. I still don't think of my body as "me." However, my body won't let me forget: Whoever I am, I am not in charge. 

– Mike Huber

Listening With My Body


This experience has come through my awareness of a large construction project at my living community, Rose Villa. Due to begin actively this coming winter and to last perhaps eighteen months intensely, this project will be big (about half of our landscape), disruptive (right in the middle and affecting everyone), noisy, dusty, messy, and totally transformative of the area affected. Landscape will be vastly changed and nothing will be the same, except that this will remain our home, for about 200 of us, throughout and afterwards.

Over the months, I have felt awareness of this grow beyond my mind's edges, into and throughout my body – every fiber and every cell bracing themselves for the coming impact. Several months ago I knew there was impact also on the body of the Earth and all its local living systems of this landscape, soon to be so altered. I knew this in my own

body, "picked up" somehow from the land of our home here. I suddenly knew I must respond to this knowing. It was my part of helping the ground, water courses, living things – parts of the community to which my own body belongs.

Landscape intuitives have said each of us can do this. Oh my, I thought with my brain.

But I set out, walking in and out all the paths and streets and alleys that would soon be impacted by change. With good Benedictine attentiveness, I "listened with the ear of my heart" to everything here in the "Zone". I returned heart prayers to it all in response: seeking strength of belonging, encouraging hope against chaos and despair, affirming our continued mutual care, being present. In this way I shared experience with the Earth community where I live. I have tried to listen for its responses or needs but I have so much to learn about how to listen with my body this way.

I have done this four or five hours a week, since February, to continue as long as I can through the time ahead. I am learning to tune my body to this Earth where I live. This is a part of my "service" to the Creator and all her creation. I am a part of it. We will all survive together. 

– Carol Bosworth

Ode to a Fibroid

Hard like a rock
Round like a globe
Blood filled
Like you think you're nurturing something
Invaded my world

Just like a parasite
Made of my tissue
Blood filled
Like you think you are part of me
Devoured my energy


You act like a baby
Make my body your home
Took over my life
Like you think you're in charge
Took my dreams

Hard like my heart
Empty of life
Blood filled
Like you think you can fool me
Into giving in

A whole world of pain
Uncharted terrain
Deeper than deepest reserves
You think you can beat me
Into submission

I had you cut out
I damaged myself
Blood loss
Because you were part of me
Reluctant to go

I needed to live
No answers
No revelations
I had to do something
But I'm sorry I did

Hard like a rock
Round like a globe
Blood filled
Like you think you are nourishing something
You took of me 
— JMSH

“Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.”

So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”

Genesis 27:21-22 (RSV)

I have perceiv’d that to be with those I like is enough,
To stop in company with the rest at evening is enough,

To be surrounded by beautiful, curious, breathing,
laughing flesh is enough,

To pass among them, or touch any one, or rest my arm
ever so lightly round his or her neck for a moment—
what is this, then?

I do not ask any more delight—I swim in it, as in a sea.

There is something in staying close to men and women,
and looking on them, and in the contact and odor of
them, that pleases the soul well;

All things please the soul—but these please the soul
well.

From *I Sing the Body Electric*, by Walt Whitman (1900)

The Body is Amazing

This video is an invitation to honor and
celebrate the gifts of the human body.

<http://tinyurl.com/cbwjwpk> 

— Melanie Weidner



Discipline

In the spring of 1989 I joined a team to run the Hood-to-Coast Relay Race. I was in my early thirties, and looking for some inspiration and motivation to get into shape and maybe lose some weight. Running wasn't fun, but it was aerobic and "good for you."

There are no shortcuts, no easy outs when training to run 15 miles (the event has each runner out there 3 times, for distances of approximately 5 miles each time). Eleven other people are expecting you to prepare, to log the miles, to do your part.

My simple goal was to run every step when it was my turn. I began training at the track, alternating walking and jogging the four laps that made up one mile. By the end of a week, I could jog the entire mile without stopping. From there it was a gradual progression of distance, no longer at the track but instead up and over Terwilliger Blvd. Three to four times each week I'd get out the door and run. I didn't like it, but it was "good for me."


I didn't know my teammates. A friend of mine worked at a company in Tigard, and their team needed one more person. We met as a team only a couple times before the race, and they were all Runners. They wore Lycra and spandex; they had technical shirts. But they

welcomed me and I was part of the Team.

For 26 hours my van-mates and I ran, ate, slept, and encouraged each other.

I met my goal, and making this victory even sweeter was seeing David at his volunteer job just as I was finishing the third of my three runs, a 6.2-miler in the coastal range. It was all perfect. I had run every step of those three runs! I was pleased, proud, amazed that I could do this. My teammates and I celebrated our accomplishments, and we parted as friends. [I would run with them for the next two years.] For weeks afterward there was this glow, this joy, this aura of wonder surrounding the memory of that long day.

And then I heard The Voice. It said, "What if you put the same focused energy into your spiritual life as you have just put into your physical life?" It was a sobering question, a deep question, a question bursting with potential. It was, as I would learn to call it years later, a Query.

The answer to that Query eventually led me to West Hills Friends. But that's another story for another time. 
— Julie Peyton

*"For God. . . has shone in our hearts. . .
But we have this treasure in jars of
clay, to show that the surpassing power
belongs to God and not to us.
2 Corinthians 4-7*

My Body As Teacher

My body has been one of my greatest teachers.

When I was a teenager, I used to wish I could have a miracle, so I could see 20/20 and no longer need glasses, which I'd worn since I was 10 years old.

Then one day when I was around 18 or 19 years old, I woke up in my University of Oregon dorm room from a short night's sleep after a late night studying. Oh, shoot! I had fallen asleep with my contact lenses in. I removed them and discovered I could see perfectly. Wow! I walked to lunch, looking around the cafeteria and was amazed to see clearly all the way across the room. (My contact lenses prescription was around 20/800, meaning usually I couldn't see clearly even a foot from my face.)

At the time, I had a rather cynical roommate, and I was embarrassed to believe that I really could've had a miracle. I knew that near-sightedness involves an elongation of the eye, so there was part of me thinking that maybe my contacts being in had caused my eye length to shorten in those few hours of sleep. I was vacillating between REALLY?? and Naw, it couldn't be... And, after a few hours of perfect sight, my vision slowly faded back to 20/800.


I was disappointed, and now I was embarrassed to think that I

might have rejected a miracle from God. I'll never know what really happened to my eyes on that day, but that doesn't even matter now because my first teaching had begun. I said I was sorry (to God and myself) if I had rejected a miracle and that if I ever experienced another miracle, I would accept it.

As it turns out, sharing the miraculous experiences and their teachings as they have come my way over these many decades is not something I can describe in 500 words. These joint efforts on the part of my body, God, my Soul Self, and Life itself have revealed to me unique spiritual teachings needed for each phase of my development. The learnings have varied, all speaking of the love of God and the mysterious ways the temple of my body honors Life and my unfolding growth.

If you're enticed to read the chronicles*, they include various healing experiences related to a pulled hamstring, hypoglycemia, sugar cravings, brain chemistry, diabetes, Normal Tension Glaucoma, astigmatism, and stretched sprained ligaments. Of greater significance, they reveal many ways my relationship with my body presented expansive learnings. Underlying these many adventures is my belief in Albert Einstein's words: "There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a

miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." I guess it's pretty obvious which I choose to believe.

– Jeanine DuBois 

*For those who are interested, the link below will take you to the expanded story.

<http://tinyurl.com/ofsshuz>

Exercise as Peaceful Prayer

I believe God wants me to be the best steward of my physical body that I can be. I believe taking good care of my body is a responsibility that comes along with the gift of life God has given me.

I haven't always felt this way. When I was in high school, my asthma was bad and I looked like I was walking around the track at school when I was trying to run it! That was embarrassing. Later, in my twenties, I dieted with my co-workers, but I didn't exercise. It wasn't until 1985, when I was 33 and overweight that I began exercising.

I began by walking. I wanted to measure my walking and didn't have a pedometer, so I walked around a nearby 3-mile lake. I gave myself permission to take as long as I needed, with as many rest periods as I needed. That's how it all began for me.

Walking was an easy way for me to begin exercising, and it has been a convenient and relaxing time to pray. Lap swimming is another type of

exercise that makes it easy to for me pray at the same time. I've also found that biking is a good time for me to pray, depending on where I'm biking.

I'm not the only person to pray during exercise. In the September 2003 issue of the magazine, *Organic Style, the Art of Living in the Balance*, there was an article about a 77-year-old Catholic nun, named Sister Madonna, who endorses running and praying. She says that it's never too late to begin exercising (but check with your doctor first). She also says, "Don't go it alone." And, I'll have to admit that having an exercise partner makes exercise a lot easier.

An extra bonus that comes with taking a walk outside is the freedom to enjoy the Nature. Nature is another gift from God.

At one time, when having daily pain in my shoulder, I experienced pain relief after really difficult aerobic exercise classes. For me, exercise is an anti-depressant. I appreciate that I can go outdoors for a walk no matter what I'm wearing – even my Sunday best! Yes, I do change my shoes!

When in Oregon, I enjoy the lush green outside my door; here in California, I am becoming fond of the green hills in winter that turn a beautiful gold. I feel blessed here because everyone is so

friendly, neighbors and merchants alike. It adds a warm and fuzzy feeling for me to say 'Hi!' to everyone who crosses my path. And, my friendliness seems to create a network of caring that motivates me to go out walking again and again. 🔥
 – Barbara Reynolds

Story Catchers

Please let us know if you have a story but don't consider yourself a writer, don't have time, don't feel well, are too young to know how to write stories, or any other reason. We would love to send a story catcher to record your story.

If you can't come to us, we would love to come to you :)

My Temple

Sometimes I feel prayers. At those times, when someone is praying for me, my right temple becomes very warm. This has happened both when I knew someone was praying for me and when I didn't know. On at least one occasion, I felt much better immediately.

I have no theories about my body's response to prayer because it's unpredictable. It doesn't happen whenever someone is praying for me, and it's not connected to a particular person or even to my need for prayer, as far as I can tell. And for reasons I don't understand, it doesn't happen nearly as often these days as it once did.

I found two examples to share from old journals. The first example happened before I understood that the warmth was connected to prayer.

September 1993. (I'd been going through a difficult time and quite a few people were praying for me.) From my journal: *Yesterday, I went into the spare attorney's office to lie down on the couch because I didn't feel at all well. I've been fighting this virus everyone seems to have. As I lay there, my right temple became very warm, like it did that other time. I thought it must be Jesus' touch. I didn't know what was happening, but I fell asleep, and after the nap I felt much better than I had all day. The temporary secretary at Charlene's desk noticed a difference in me. After my nap, I was joking with people, and she said something to the effect that I must be a night person just waking up because she'd felt earlier like she was working in a morgue.*

October, 1998. (I was planning to look at an apartment I wanted very badly, and some of my friends knew this). From my journal: *“Right about noon I felt my forehead on the right get very warm, and I thought that someone must be praying. Later, I got an email from H. saying, “It's noon, and I'm praying like mad.”*

When I feel the touch of prayer, it's like a bright, warm drop from the vast ocean of Light. 🔥
 – Sally Gillette

If you missed the deadline, don't miss the Afterglow!

Were you inspired to respond to an earlier query but missed the deadline? If so, please send us your story anyway! When we receive stories that meet all of our guidelines except the deadline, we'll publish them on our website. Eventually we hope to publish a special “Afterglow” chapter of Minding the Light.

Afterglow. noun. (1) Soft radiance that remains after the light source has gone. (2) Gentle sense of contentment after a successful event or experience. (3) A special Chapter of Minding the Light that contains new responses to previous Chapter queries.

The Creation of Humans*



– from *The Creation of Adam* by Michaelangelo

*“Humankind” (Heb. adam) does not specify sex, as is clear from the last line of the poem.” (Gen 27)
 From the Five Books of Moses, translation by Everett Fox.

Contributions to Minding the Light for printing and mailing costs are much appreciated. Your tax-deductible donation may be sent to:

West Hills Friends
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Checks should indicate the donation is for Minding the Light.