

# MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 26

WHAT EXPERIENCE OF THE LIGHT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF YOUR BODY AS A TEACHER?

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

John Woolman

## Acceptance

Because of injuries sustained in an automobile accident 27 years ago, I spend most of my time hooked up to an IV. I usually carry it on my back or push it around in a stroller, and sometimes my dog carries it to give my body a rest. It's not something that was easy to accept, but I have come to a reluctant acceptance of it and try to be a good sport about it.

However, several years ago as I was painting an accent wall in my living room, I was pushed to my limit. The IV tubing kept interfering with my ability to do the job. I managed to drag it through the tray of paint several times and then the tubing caught on the tray and flipped it over. It tangled in the drop cloths. It banged up against the

painted wall. It knocked over a can of paint.

I want to live my life as if I have no burden to carry and stubbornly try to live my life that way, and I become furious when reality interferes with my plans. I felt defeated and incapacitated and overwhelmed.

Worse than the feelings of anger and frustration though, was the guilt I felt for feeling them. I believed that if I were truly a spiritual person I would accept whatever I was given patiently and gratefully. That I would grow from my burdens and tragedies. I felt that God was judging me as a failure for my resentment. I felt completely defeated.

But as I began to lecture myself on my bad attitude, it came to me that I was mistaken. I felt a certainty that God was not judging me. I suddenly believed that whatever or wherever God is, that God feels just as bad about my afflictions and

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hardships as I do. I felt that the divinity I worship is a compassionate being that aches for our pains and sorrows and hindrances and obstructions.

In my desire to put a good face on things, to be a good sport, to be agreeable and acquiescent, I have often felt isolated, alone with my pain, hardships, and frustration. This new understanding validated not just that my life can be burdensome, but that there is something greater than I am that knows and cares deeply about the difficult realities of my life.

Believing that God feels my pain and struggles has given me permission to feel them and admit to them and accept them. Instead of fighting against my limitations I am able to dance with them gracefully. Or paint with them. I have been able to come to peace with the reality of life. 

—Mica Coffin

*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 relationships with God and shared them with the community. For example, John Woolman's Journal has been continually in print for more than 200 years. By publishing stories from our community, we hope to continue the Quaker tradition of disclosing God's activity in our lives.

Each issue is organized around a specific 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.

## Prescott Street

My job was a coveted position and a rare opportunity for students in my program. It was part-time, it allowed me to learn from other professionals in my field, it gave me an opportunity to do what I felt called to do, and it provided my family with some extra income. I got along well with my coworkers and my boss loved me.

Yet every night before work my heart would beat faster and I would feel jittery and irritated. I slept poorly. By the next morning my stomach would feel queasy and my hands would shake. I had a hard time keeping food down. As I drove up Prescott Street, I would do breathing exercises to calm my body. I would end my commute by praying that in that day's work I would learn something new and do some good. Maybe confidence in my ability to do my job would soothe my physical disquiet.

I did learn a lot and I did do some good. There were very difficult days and there were days that felt rewarding. I liked the work I did overall and still felt strongly about being in my field, but there was something about the job that didn't sit right with me. I chalked it up to an anxious personality and told myself if I just stayed there it would get better.

After ten months of dreading every workday, I entertained the idea of quitting. The notion seemed absurd

at first. Why would I quit something that was such a great opportunity, that other people wanted so much, that I hadn't even been doing for a year? I sat with the idea for some time and finally decided it was the right thing to do; my job was actually hurting me. As soon as I allowed myself to accept this, I felt a huge weight lift off my shoulders.

The quitting process went very smoothly. My superiors were positive about my work and assured me I was welcome back at any time. I agreed to stay on another couple of months until they found someone to replace me and I could help with the training. Those last months, my stomach felt less sick as I drove to work, I felt steadier.

A few months after I stopped working, my husband and I were in the car running errands. All of a sudden I felt shaky and anxious and sick to my stomach. While he ran into a shop I stayed in the car, trying to figure out what my problem was. Then it hit me that we were on Prescott Street and had driven most of the same route that I used to take to work. As soon as I named this as the cause, my body relaxed; my stomach unclenched, my hands steadied and I almost laughed out loud.

My body had known long before I had that my place of work was not right for me. I hadn't given it enough credit to listen.   
-B.W.

## Queries for Chapter 27

Our next Query: *What has been your experience with hope? Tell us a story about how the Light has been revealed through hope lost, hope found or hope sustained.*

We encourage young Friends to participate, so please consider interpreting this query for young children in your life to see if it makes them think of a story. If it does, consider helping the child tell their story in words or images, or ask us for a Story Catcher.

### Story Deadline:

**January 15, 2017**

## Publication Guidelines

Stories and other written responses should be 500 words or less, and written in the first person by a member or attender of West Hills Friends. Written responses should be submitted in text format in the body of an email addressed to: [mindingthelight@gmail.com](mailto:mindingthelight@gmail.com).

Story content should be appropriate for young Friends.

If your story needs to be edited to conform to our guidelines, one of our editors will contact you.

Please include a title and byline with your submission. We will withhold your name at your request, or use initials, etc.

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

## Becoming Myself

Over the course of my life, I have cried many times while looking in the mirror. Some tears have been shed mournfully, and others, joyfully.

I came to view myself as transgender at seventeen years old. Within a few days of coming to terms with this identity, I bought an ace bandage to bind my chest. At two o'clock in the morning, when my entire family was in bed, I snuck into the bathroom and wrapped the bandage once, twice, three times around my chest. Again and again, I wrapped it tighter, until finally, my torso was flatter than I had ever seen it. I pulled on a sweatshirt, took a look at myself in the mirror, and wept. That bandage was relieving me of what the trans community calls "gender dysphoria," or the unsettling feeling of being disconnected from our bodies due to gender expectations and presentations. I don't remember how long I looked at myself in the mirror that night, in pure joy.

But within a few minutes of putting on the binder, my entire upper body ached. With every breath, the bandage worked to further constrict my movement, leaving me breathless. And not in the way that I had hoped.

The next day, I ignored my instincts that told me to leave the binder at home and instead wore it to school. By the end of the day, my spirit was overjoyed—friends seemed to affirm my new look, right away, which

made it easier for them to get my new name and pronouns right—but my body felt deflated. I couldn't breathe. When I got undressed later in the afternoon, I found bruises lining my ribcage. My shoulders ached.

I kept wearing that bandage on my chest until a few months later, when I found a chest binder that was specifically designed for bodies like mine. Though it made chest binding a bit easier, I still had aches and pains that refused to subside. For six years, I bound my chest. For six years, I struggled to breathe on a daily basis. For six years, I had to decide between satisfying my soul (by choosing to bind) and satisfying my body (by choosing not to.) For six years, I took my chest binder off at night and could take my first full breath of the day, but I couldn't look in the mirror. For six years, I tried to convince myself that having chest surgery wasn't necessary, or even possible. There were plenty of reasons why I believed I couldn't

have surgery—financial inadequacy, fear of what others would think or say, and the concern that I just wasn't trying hard enough to love my body as it was.

By the fall of 2014, I felt defeated. I was trying to become more physically active for the first time in my life, but I could hardly breathe. I could barely run half a mile before giving up and walking, slowly, back home.

A check-up with my doctor confirmed what I had been denying for years: my body could not handle being bound, despite how free it made me feel. My lung capacity had been reduced by 40% because of the binder.

My body knew, it seems, that chest reconstructive surgery was a kinder option than wearing a binder day in and day out. Eventually, I understood that too. Eventually, I found peace about it. That winter, I was able to find the funding that I desperately needed for surgery. And on April 21, 2015, I shed my binder for the last time. With it, I shed the need to choose between my inner self and outer self. I wandered into the hospital for surgery that day without a fear or concern on my heart.

A week later, my story seemed to come full circle as my surgeon unwrapped the post-operative ace bandage from my chest and allowed me to look at myself, fully, for the first time. I wept again, but this time, my body seemed to be weeping tears of joy for my soul.   
—Elijah Walker

### Light Brigade\*

Clerk (Alternating)

Mike Huber, Recording Clerk

Anne Anderson

Carol Bosworth

Stephen Deatherage

Peg Edera

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# MINDING THE LIGHT

CHAP 26: WHAT EXPERIENCE OF THE LIGHT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU THINK OF YOUR BODY AS A TEACHER?

## Learning New Seeing

For most of my life, my body has been a teacher of lessons I often didn't learn gently: e.g., energy limits; reality checks on life choices because I am female, not male; limits when I stretch for knowing beyond my intelligence or my human condition, etc. Now as I age, the messages come with behavior limits that have changed my life and I can't argue with them so well: e.g. eyesight failing (stop driving, thus be dependent on others; also it is humbling to need the vision of others in order to use a bus or train.); hearing changes causing damaging pain from loud noises such as excited crowds or over-amped/malfunctioning PA systems (so I must wear ear-plug filters to public events and to church.) These changes, among others, separate me from people I love, care about, am interested in knowing and can no longer be with in previously normal ways. I don't like to complain and I am not alone in getting old. (You are too!!!! It is contagious!)

So rather than complain (mostly), I have begun to pay attention to what I get in return when I cooperate. Some of these lessons have been life-altering in themselves, once I started to listen.

An example: At church, when I can't hear what Mike is saying (in the mike) or when I can't hear a Friend giving a message during

Open Worship (again even in the mike), I have ceased my agitated frustrations and begun to settle down into a large cloud of peaceful love and silence—and this (if I pay attention) brings me an awareness of the person sharing words I can't hear—awareness of their emotions, the motions of their hearts, their energy of yearning/joy/grief—and I feel myself “with them” in a deep way I am grateful for, that I didn't often hear if I could only hear their words.

Another example: sitting in the cloud of peaceful love and silence, I can feel certain I have touched one or more of the Friends around me, even as I sit motionless and maybe even un-noticed by folks being engaged more actively. So when I pass through the crowd, leaving the Meeting Room or the Fellowship Room, to go to rest in our car outside, I know I have been with the Friends at West Hills in a way that has good and love-filled meaning for me. And I believe it when others tell me, “I'm so glad you were here today!”

And I wouldn't believe this if my body hadn't loaded me up with messages I didn't ask for or greet with any happiness at the time! God has used my body to get messages through to me when other ways of knowing aren't listened to. He doesn't give up! (Thank you, God...) 

—Carol Bosworth

So God created humankind in his image  
in the image of God did he create it,  
male and female created he them.

God blessed them,  
God said to them,  
Bear fruit and be many and fill the earth  
and subdue it!

Have dominion over the fish of the sea,  
the fowl of the heavens,  
and all living things that crawl  
upon the earth!

God said:  
Here, I give you  
all plants that bear seeds that are  
upon the face of all the earth,  
and all trees in which there is tree  
fruit that bears seeds,  
for you shall they be, for eating;

and also for all the living things of  
the earth, for all the fowl of the  
heavens, for all that crawls about  
upon the earth in which  
there is a living being—  
all green plants for eating.  
It was so.

Now God saw all that he had made  
and here: it was exceedingly good!

There was setting, there was dawn-  
ing: the sixth day.

Genesis 2:27-31, *Schocken Bible*,  
Vol I, translated by Everett Fox  
(Torah/Five Books of Moses)



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### My Body, My Teacher, My Life

I really want to write and the tremor makes me grateful for the computer, but my eyes keep returning to the waves. I hear the breakers crash, smell the ocean air, and feel the warm wind. Rhythm is in the waves, the tides, the days and nights, the moon, sun, seasons, and years. It is also in family, community, and the worldwide network of living connections between us, nature, and the earth. Life is so incredibly precious.

I almost died at thirty-two. A near-death experience sent me back to unfinished work. But within months, three people I knew died. I started a hospice and received the gift of being present at many deaths over the next few years. The moment of transition, the thinness of the veil, communications with the other side before and after the transition, and the resulting meaning and growth for the dying, their family and friends, all these were deeply significant.

I grew, work changed, and one day was working hard in my new yoga class. A spiritual mentor, extremely important to me, had died just two days earlier. While I was precariously balanced in a new yoga position, he zoomed into the room and simply said, "Stay in your body," before zooming out again. I was startled, and so honored by his appearance. In subtle ways and over many years, this changed my life.

Now the tides have turned yet again. With age I give new meaning to something basically obvious: without my body, I am no longer living on this earth. This life really depends on the functioning of my body. I have no fear of dying; I simply want to live here, need to write, want to live in family and community, and share the joy and heartache of life.

I have long been energized by my passion for ideas or causes, and by pushing through, could reap the rewards. But now I crash, sometimes before

### 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

completion — not how I want to live. My body hurts, wants to move, or not move. What is the pace? It is even more confusing because recent medical discoveries and new therapies have minimized thirty-three years of injury-caused pain and limits. Although those are healing, age has brought new aches, limits, and a slower pace. Is this the same body? How much can I accomplish today? Am I left with only these six years before I am the age of both parents at their deaths? Or another nineteen or thirty-one like my grandmothers?

New ways are needed to get through a day. I hear breakers crash, smell ocean air, and feel warm wind. Rhythm is in waves, tides, days and nights, moon, sun, seasons, and years. It is also in family, community, and throughout the entire network of living connections between us, nature, earth, the universe. Is there a rhythm in my body??? Life is so incredibly precious. 

—Pat M.

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## Are We There Yet?

I am on a long journey, and my body comes along like a child in the backseat. Over and over, it asks me, "Are we there yet?" From the back seat, my body complains about motion sickness. It complains about being hungry. Or thirsty. It complains about the temperature.

With my eyes on the road, I tell my body, "If you're quiet, I'll buy you an ice cream cone."

Out of duty, I go to visit my body in a home for the elderly and infirm. With a sigh, it tells me that growing old is hard. "How are your knees?" I ask. "Is your back still bothering you? Are you taking your medicine?" I wish we had more to discuss than the latest symptoms and analgesics.

With my eyes on the clock, I tell my body, "I'll see you again soon."

Although my feet are on level ground, my body feels like it's poised at the edge of a diving board. I've exchanged the butterflies of my childhood for three vultures and an emu. The emu can't fly, and the vultures don't even try. They sit inside me, ruffling their feathers and waiting for something awful to happen.

I feel the carbonated foam of my anxiety; I'm like two liters of soda inside a plastic bottle. I've been rolled across the parking lot. I've been bounced over uneven ground.

I'm heading straight for the highway. If the seal is broken, I will probably explode.

My breathing is shallow.

My arm is numb.

Everything I've told you happens in a moment. I'm sitting at a table on my patio. The trees around me are green, but tinged with the first colors of autumn. It is a beautiful, terrible time of year. For days, my body has followed me around like a cat that meows and meows and meows. I ask without expecting an answer: "What do you want?"

Suddenly, there is a tunnel of light. Something connects between the pit of my stomach and a forgotten storeroom within my skull. I can feel a tunnel open inside of me. The pain within me has found a new-old door. The connection is primal, but it surprises. I didn't see it coming. I start to cry.

For just a moment, I hope that crying will bring release. I hope that everything inside me will finally come out. I hope that this bodily function will purge me, like the catharsis that comes after food poisoning.

I cry, hoping that I've finally arrived.

I am on a long journey, and my body comes along like a child in the backseat. Over and over, it asks me, "Are we there yet?"  
—Mike Huber

## Dancing in the Light

When skies are clear on Winter days, the sun beams through tall windows and sparkles across the 90-degree therapy pool. Often the only one present, I feel the freedom to twirl and splash. The salty water holds me upright. I can dance in the beauty, joy and wonder of warm, liquid Light. 

—Thea

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)

## Learning to Listen

It starts in the legs and shoulders. A vague tension, a kind of nervousness that doesn't seem to be related to anything in particular. I feel it before I understand it. It's not always a feeling of something being wrong, but it often is. Eventually, when I can identify the cause, it goes away, easing me back to normalcy, like taking off a rubber band that has been on your wrist for way too long.

Other times, my body does things entirely outside my awareness. At the age of 10, I began noticing I was attracted to other boys in my class. It wasn't subtle. These weren't feelings I'd had before, and they came on strongly, and nearly immediately. As much as it's difficult now to separate reality from my Baptist worldview, I don't think I ever believed I was anything but straight. I just had non-straight feelings. After about five years of shame and depression over feelings I didn't want to have, puberty wrapped itself up, and my body was once again in harmony with the reality my mind already knew. The feelings left, and haven't returned

As an adult, my body is frequently out in front of my mind. There are days I'll feel a tension or a stress point, and I have no idea why. Sometimes these tensions will last days, when suddenly, out on a walk, the explanation will manifest in my brain instantly. The reasons always seem so obvious, but my body is more in touch with my feelings than "I" am.

Learning to listen to my body, and separate my identity from my body,

has paid off in several ways. After months of ill-defined stress and vague frustration, I connected the dots between my stress and my use of social media. Ending my relationship with most of the internet solved the problem my body was trying to point out.

For years, I wanted to lose weight on an intellectual level, but couldn't find the willpower. Then one day, driving home from the beach, the willpower filled me up, and stayed with me long enough to lose over 50 pounds. Because I now understand how the process works, I'm not worried about the rest of the weight I want to lose, because I know willpower comes and goes, and it will come back again.

My body is not who I am, but I'm willing to listen to what it tells me. Knowing what it feels like when I have internal homework to do, I'm getting better at looking within for answers. More often than not, the feelings my body comes up with lead to a better quality of life. I'm grateful for this detached partner that's looking out for me, even when I'm not. 

—Ryan Blanchard

### 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



¿Si la muerte es la muerte,  
qué será de los poetas  
y de las cosas dormidas  
que ya nadie las recuerda?  
¡Oh sol de las esperanzas!  
¡Agua clara! ¡Luna nueva!  
¡Corazones de los niños!  
¡Almas rudas de las piedras!  
Hoy siento en el corazón  
un vago temblor de estrellas  
y todas las rosas son  
tan blancas como mi pena.

[From *Cancion Otonal* (*Autumn's Song*, or *A Fall Song*), by Federico Garcia Lorca]

Translation by Julie Peyton:

And if death is really death  
What will become of the poets  
And of the sleeping things  
that no one now remembers?  
O light of my hopes!  
Clear water! New moon!  
The hearts of children!  
The rough souls of the rocks!

Today I am feeling in my heart  
A vague trembling of stars  
And all the roses are  
As white as my sorrow.

and i said  
to my body.  
softly.  
'i want to be your friend.'  
it took a long breath.  
and replied  
'i have been waiting  
my whole life  
for this.'  
—Nayyirah Waheed

### Holding God's Hand

Before I left for Bolivia, I ran across this biblical quotation: *"For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you."* Isaiah 41:13. Little did I know, I would be holding God's hand as well as the hands of most everyone on our team during this trip!

About two weeks before the trip, I injured my left knee at the gym. It was getting much better before we left, but after two days on the airplane, my knee became swollen and painful. I could still walk, but limped and could not do stairs without assistance.

In addition to impaired mobility from the knee injury, a few other experiences tested me. We were unable to get most of our medications through Customs at the Santa Cruz airport in Bolivia. Since I work mainly in the clinic's pharmacy, this was very worrisome. What would we have to give to our patients?

Then, one morning, I lost my "brain" (my cell phone) on the bus going to our clinic. On another morning, I missed the bus. Luckily, Sara S. was still at the hotel, and she called Mari Kay on her cell phone. The bus had been ten minutes into the journey to the clinic, but turned around and came back after me.

One night, I thought I was locked out of my motel room in San Julian as I couldn't find my key. My

friends were amused when I found it in my other pocket.

On the other hand, it was very exciting to be in a country that I had never experienced before! We were embraced by wonderful Bolivian Quaker hospitality. They were so happy that we had arrived, and so willing to help us in our clinics. Team members chipped in, and we bought the essential medications we needed in the pharmacy. We still ended up seeing approximately 800 patients in our two clinics!

I realized I was able to do my job well in the pharmacy because I received the help I needed from God, my teammates and prayers from home. I enjoyed relating to the Bolivian people at the pharmacy window and practicing Spanish with them. One day, I teamed up with Margarita, our pharmacy interpreter, and gave a talk to our patients about hypertension.

All I had to do was reach out my hand and someone would come along and help me up and down stairs, carry my suitcase, and help me walk along rough roads, especially at night. I was even able to make it up the daunting, stone steps on the mountainside of Sun Island to the Fountain of Youth!

So, I was humbled by needing assistance. I literally experienced firsthand the power of Love that helped keep me going. There was

no room for fear, just profound gratitude and calmness because I had been holding God's hand the whole time.

It has been five months since I returned home from this trip to Bolivia. My knee seems well healed and I am grateful for that. I am starting to prepare to go again in April 2017. I'm wondering what God has in store for me on this next trip? 

—Margie Simmons



Annunciation, painting by He Qi  
He Qi © 2013, [www.heqigallery.com](http://www.heqigallery.com)

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)

**Tears of Love**

Tears streamed down my face. I sat next to my husband in the back row of our little Quaker meeting house while dear Friend Peg spoke about violence and guns and bearing witness and having hope. She spoke about honoring others, recognizing our shared humanity, and living out our love for each other.

I quickly beckoned for a pencil and scribbled a note to my Bugs (the nickname my husband I use for each other): "If your heart gets broken, I will hold you." We stared straight ahead, barely looking at each other, with one giant shared lump in each of our throats.

I cautiously looped my arm around his shoulder, gently placing my hand on his back. I rested my head on his shoulder as he rested his head softly against me. I felt myself listening to his body, waiting to be sure he wanted me in his space, so as not to interrupt his own experience of listening and sinking into the silence of open worship on his own terms.

This was a spiritual experience.

Tears streamed down my face freely as I felt an ever so slight shaking from underneath my arm. Out of the corner of my eye, I witnessed him reaching to wipe the corner of his eye with his sleeve.

This was a spiritual experience. For both of us.

As is true in my experience of all heartfelt human connection.

**The Wild Geese**

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting ~  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things  
—Mary Oliver

I had to leave early that day, and it took me an hour to unravel and process those tears. I'd cried them before, especially often that weekend as my husband I discussed our feelings openly while pondering some major changes in our relationship.

Those were not tears of sadness. And while they were most certainly tears of pain, they were also tears of freedom and tears of joy. These were tears that represented our ever continuing transformation. These tears gave voice to my (our?) pain and offered a river of hope to wash it all away.

These tears represented the deepest form of love I've ever felt. Thirteen years in the making. A gratitude for all that's been shared and all that we ARE, mixed with hope for all that we can be, both as individuals and

as partners, as we continue learning how to feel openly and honestly while pursuing our best selves.

And with these tears, I can finally recognize and actually FEEL, for the first time perhaps in my entire life, that my body truly belongs to me. I own every single piece.   
—Sarah Blanchard

It is a mellow day, very gentle. The ash has lost its leaves and when I went out to get the mail and stopped to look up at it, I rejoiced to think that soon everything here will be honed down to structure. It is all a rich farewell now to leaves, to color. I think of the trees and how simply they let go, let fall the riches of a season, how without grief (it seems) they can let go and go deep into their roots for renewal and sleep.  
—May Sarton