



MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 22

WHEN HAS THE LIGHT CALLED YOU TO WAIT OR BE STILL?

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

John Woolman

Listening for God

I have been attending West Hills for something like eight years now. During my early years here, I remember that one or more of Mike's messages involved Jesus appearing in the form of a stranger at the door, speaking directly. I have also heard others stand up to give First Word or messages where they have clearly heard the voice of God speaking to them. The Bible is full of stories of God appearing or speaking clearly. Yet for me, I always feel a twinge of sadness or longing when I hear these parts of their stories. God doesn't present himself to me like that, as much as I may will it or want to experience it.

I have had a different experience of the Spirit in my life—an image or feeling that came to me five or six years ago. I began to experience the Spirit as a fleeting, transient presence, somehow there, but not “catch-able”, for lack of a better way to describe it. Rather than a concrete appearance at my door or voice of an angel, I felt a rustling movement, as if there was a spirit in my house moving across the hallway from one room to another; but when I would whirl around to look, I could only catch the disappearance of a ghost, the fleeting wisp of a garment.

I felt that I wasn't just dreaming it, though—that the Spirit's presence was there. For those of you with children, you'll understand this analogy to my experience. When your children are tucked into their beds at night and you're sitting in your kitchen, you don't have to see them to know that they're there, to feel their presence. You

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just FEEL it. The same way you feel the emptiness when they're away for the evening. My feeling of the Spirit was like that—a fleeting presence, one that I could sense but not quite see or touch or hear.

After this had been going on for a while, I started getting called to share that image as a First Word of my experience. And calls. And nudges. This went on a few years. But that was a number of years ago already. For though I felt nudged to share this image, I sat with it silently. I'd get a nudge, and think “maybe it's time to speak it.” But I didn't.

And then, sometime during the past year or two, that presence, that feeling—it silently went absent. It felt as though God had gone away on an extended business trip, leaving me sitting in a quiet, empty house. I had recently begun to wonder if She was even coming back, would ever appear at my door like in stories, actually speak clearly to me, or simply

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.

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return as that fleeting ethereal presence. I was starting to question what faith really meant to me, if I couldn't hear any clear voice or feel any presence anymore. I felt like I had missed my opportunity, and failed.

In April of this year, we had two successive messages that cited the same passage from Luke:

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to me, and hears my sayings, and does them, I will show you whom he is like. He is like a man which built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock. He that heareth and doeth not, is like a man without a foundation."

The very first week, that passage grabbed me firmly and shook me. It said plainly that what I must do to share the state of my spiritual experience. This is the action that I was being called to take, in order to be authentic and respond to the calling. I was simply to be brave and stand here and share this image of how the Spirit once moved in my life and has been quiet of late. When I heard the same passage cited again the very next week, well, that was it. I told Mike that I wanted to give a First Word. I didn't have the words formed, but I needed to make the commitment to bring it.

As I prepared and recognized the call to speak, I wryly realized the humor in this—that this call to speak is an actual concrete mes-

sage after all. So here I am, finally, not just hearing but responding to something perhaps bigger than just a nudge to email or call someone. Perhaps in actually voicing my experience here, doing so may open my way to something more. I don't know. We'll see where this goes.

Anyhow . . . this is how God has moved thru my life, and gone quiet, and perhaps returns. Maybe next time there will be a knock at my door, I'll open it to finally find Jesus standing there asking to come in and sit down. What will I have to say to Him? What will I have to ask Him when he does? I don't know yet. But I'm working on it. And waiting and listening for that knock. 🔥

—Frank V

How long, O Lord?
Will You forget me forever?
How long will You hide
Your face from me?
How long must I
wrestle with my thoughts
and every day
have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph
over me?
Look on me and answer,
O LORD my God.
Give light to my eyes,
or I will sleep in death;
my enemy will say,
"I have overcome him,"
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
But I trust in Your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in Your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD, for He has
been good to me.
—Psalm 13:1-2

Queries for Chapter 23

Our next Query: *"How did the Light lead you to West Hills Friends? Tell us a story about how you were led to be part of this community."*

We encourage you to interpret our queries broadly so as to encompass experience of the Light that the query brings to mind. Submit your story in any publishable format: narratives, poetry, songs, art, other.

Query for Young Friends (of any age)

Please be encouraged to interpret this query for young Friends or for yourself. With a nod to Godly Play, you might wonder: *"When was a time that you felt happy at West Hills Friends?"*

We encourage young Friends to participate, so please consider asking very young children in your life whether this query (or a related query in your own words) 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: 9/20/15

Light Brigade*

Sally Gillette, Clerk
Mike Huber, Recording Clerk
Anne Anderson
Carol Bosworth
Stephen Deatherage
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The Question

When I was about 4 years old, my mother bent down until she was level with my little face, pointed a red-nailed finger at me and asked, “Why did you do that?!” I vividly remember my shock. This was my first inkling that other people knew why they did things. Apparently, some could even put their motivations into words! I had come into the world an impulsive little person who raced through life on a wild tear, and I was to remain so well into my thirties, when God finally began to get through to me that it is sometimes better to consider before saying or doing whatever pops into my head; or perhaps, by then, the cat’s whiskers had been singed enough times that a few lessons had been learned.

Recently, I was asked a question, quite publicly and on the Internet, that begged to be answered... and yet, I heard God’s tempering voice holding me back. I sat at the keyboard staring at the question. It was clear that any answer might go sideways and backfire and that answering at all opened a conversation I did not want to have. My fingers hesitated over the keys.

As I always do now in such situations, I went to God in prayer. “Lord, what should I say?” I asked. In reply, God asked me, “Are you sure this is the right

question? If you are so uncomfortable, shouldn’t you sit with this awhile? Why must you answer this question at all?”

On reflection, I decided that before I answered the question put before me, I should answer God’s questions first. 

—K.D. Burnett

All Friends everywhere, keep your meetings waiting in the light which comes from the Lord Jesus Christ; so will ye receive power from him, and have the refreshing springs of life opened to your souls, and be kept sensible of the tender mercies of the Lord.

—George Fox

Shattered

Why do Quakers want to remove us from the Yearly Meeting?

My wife Pat and I have been part of Northwest Yearly Meeting for a combined total of nearly 140 years. Pat has served on several yearly meeting boards, including the Ministry Committee, where she was Clerk.

I served for 23 years on the George Fox College Board of Trustees and many years with Friends Fund. At Reedwood Friends, I negotiated the land purchase and clerked the stewardship committee that oversaw the construction of the church building.

Pat and I helped establish West Hills Friends after our son-in-law

became pastor in 1988. Here too, we have served in many roles including Sunday School teacher, Treasurer, and Clerk of the Stewards.

Recently we learned that Yearly Meeting elders and leaders have decided that West Hills Friends is out of compliance with Faith and Practice. Why? Because we are called to welcome people into membership without regard to their sexual orientation and to honor the gifts and relationships of our members and attenders without regard to their sexual identity. We have been told our calling is “shattering” to the Yearly Meeting, and some have suggested that we leave.

Pat and I and many others are being hurt by a theological perspective that places a higher value on being “right” than on “being with.” Because we interpret scripture differently than some people in the Yearly Meeting, we are seen as a “shattering” presence in the Yearly Meeting.

From their beginnings, Quakers have testified that the Light is present in everyone, and I bear witness from my experience that this testimony is true. The Light of God is present in everyone, without regard to race, age, gender or sexual orientation.

I had gay friends in high school. I served our country in the Navy along with two gay shipmates who

had my back during the Korean War and later became classmates at the University of Oregon. Later still, as a professional, I had close working relationships with gay IRS field agents on my audit team. These relationships opened my eyes to unfair and discriminatory provisions of the IRS code. As an executive, I made every effort to hire without prejudice.

During our 45 years of living in Happy Valley, neighbors on each side of us parented loving gay children. At West Hills Friends, we worship with members and attendees of various sexual orientations. It is through these close relationships that we know that the LOVE of Jesus is in all of us.

As I wait for the Yearly Meeting's decision on whether to expel West Hills Friends, I pray that God will not allow the ties that have bound us for so long to be shattered by intolerance for differing interpretations of scripture.

"You must be tenderhearted, kind, humble, meek and ready to put up with anything. You must bear with one another and, forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. On top of all this you must put on LOVE, which ties everything together and makes it complete.... And whatever you do, in word or action, do everything in the name of the master, Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the father." (Col. 3:12-17) 
—Richard Evans

A Good Time to Listen

"Slow down!" What? That didn't make any sense, but that was the message I "heard" as I entered the on-ramp to the Houston freeway. To successfully merge into the speeding traffic you speed up, not slow down, and I could see the cars beyond were moving at a normal fast rate.

That on-ramp was an unusual one, though. It went up an incline and then dipped down before merging with the freeway, so when you started up you couldn't see over the top of the hill. I didn't know what was waiting on the other side.

There are times I'm not a very good listener, but fortunately this was a time I was. I gently stepped on the brake and slowed down. Just as I crested the top of the incline and started down the ramp on the other side, I saw a stalled car in the middle of the lane!

If I hadn't slowed down, I would have plowed into it. I was so grateful for the "voice" in my head and that I actually listened and followed through. 
—Anne A.

Would any seed take root if it had not believed His promise, when God said, "Dears, I will rain. I will help you. I will turn into warmth and effulgence, I will be the Mother I am and let you draw from my body and rise, and rise."
—St Thomas Aquinas

My Vigil

*Don't go to sleep one night.
What you want most will come to you then.
Warmed by a sun inside, you'll see wonders.*
—Rumi

I'm not very good at being quiet. Internal stillness is not a natural state for me. To tell the truth, external stillness isn't my strong suit either. I'm always busy doing something. I don't like to wait, and I'm beginning to realize this does not leave me space for the quiet reflection and meditation necessary to be the healthy, peaceful, joy-filled me that I aspire to.

Many things in my life are pointing towards the need for more quiet, but recently the benefit of internal stillness became a felt experience as I kept an all-night vigil as part of an honor I received in the Boy Scouts.

I was instructed to stay up and stay mentally awake all night while I kept a fire burning until morning. I wasn't sure if I could stay awake all night—the days of college parties and cram sessions before finals are becoming distant memories. But it turns out that when I was outside on a warm, star-filled night, watching a fire that was mine to tend, and reflecting on all that had brought me to that spot—staying awake was easy.

As the hours passed, and I waited for morning, I began to think

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about all the people I love. After a while I simply became love. I was quiet, I was still like a morning lake, able to reflect back whatever was in front of me—it was a deeply moving experience, unlike anything I have felt before.

I wrote Stephen a letter that night and tried to share what I was feeling as I sat waiting by my fire. I'll share a little of it here.

“When it became clear that having our own children was not our path, you began praying for the thing that would keep us young, engaged, and let us make a difference. You realized way before I did that Scouting could be the answer to that prayer. I had no idea back in 2009 that I would ever be where I am tonight—but—WOW, what a beautiful and powerful source of commitment, service, community, learning, sharing, and service Scouting now is in my life.

Thank you Stephen for the huge role you have played in getting me to this beautiful spot by a fire I will tend til' morning, keeping a vigil that I will always remember, and striving to be the most honest, helpful, kind, loyal, loving, and compassionate person I can be.”

When I sit quietly things often become clearer, my life keeps showing me this. Keeping vigil by my fire I felt a deep and abiding love—for myself, my world, and all the people in it. I realized how many times I am deeply blessed by the thing I did not see coming.

The thing that, to begin with, I did not choose.

So stay awake, keep a vigil of your own. The night sky has secrets to share. 

—Kaleen Deatherage

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you
which shall be the darkness of God.

—T.S. Eliot

A Time to Wait

When I was a Quaker Voluntary Service fellow serving in Atlanta, I experienced what felt like a leading to travel to Uganda. Oh man...planning a trip into a country for the express purpose of breaking their laws by assisting LGBTQ people would require a lot of support and preparation. I really did not fear consequences if this was indeed a leading, but I knew that the severity of those consequences meant that I had to be absolutely sure that this was a clear path the Light was leading me towards.

I kept this quiet from most people, expecting that many would think I'd either lost my mind, or respond in an over-protective way. It was in this moment that I was so grateful to be able to call upon a time-tested Friends mechanism of discernment; the clearness committee.

The wise Friends who I asked for assistance took the leading serious-

ly, and did not try to smother it. We knew that we were listening to the same Spirit and trusted that a leading from the Spirit would only make itself more evident and clear to us all through the process. That was a rich and wonderful worship experience, and in the end the message from God was clear: wait.

I didn't feel a moment of disappointment! On the contrary, I felt joy of knowing that I could release an idea that the Guide had not given me, and that other Friends could affirm what I was taught that day.

One of the most precious gifts I was given were the words of one minister on the committee, when she shared a series of questions that she asks herself when she feels led to do something. Is it good work? Is it your work? Is it for now? I actually found them to be so useful, that I put them on my workstation at Atlanta Habitat, and find myself asking them in my mind regularly. I delight when the answer to all three is yes, but have also learned to be equally delighted when the answer to one or more is no. 

—AJ Mendoza

[See photo at www.mindingthelight.org]

I felt in need of a great pilgrimage
so I sat still for three days
and God came to me.
Kabir (c. 1440-1518)



Waiting for the Future

I've spent most of my life looking to the future, dreaming, and waiting. When I was young, I waited for a better house, meeting "the right person", and turning 18 so I could start my own life. I wanted something better than what I had. I dreamed of what my reality might look like in a far-off-distant future. I'd have a husband who loved me, children I would love deeply, and a community where I could feel safe and secure—where I would belong in a real place that I could call home, not just in some make-believe dream.

The summer I turned 18, I began to make this dream real. I moved away from my home town and stayed with my aunts, waiting for my first semester of college to start. The following summer I met my husband, Ryan. Over the next few years I continued to work and wait—to get married, discover what I wanted to do as a career, finish various educational degrees, and to get into grad school. (I was wait-listed twice for my program at a local university.)

As a young adult, I waited for jobs to fall into place and for jobs to end. I waited for my daughter to talk and walk and run and play. Perhaps the most difficult waiting of all was for my dear boy Morgan.

I had dreamed I would have a son, but I had a miscarriage, and the 12 months that followed were excruciating. Every day when I looked around my home, someone was missing. I longed for this gaping hole to be filled, and every month for a year I agonized over each recurring pee stick of betrayal (the pregnancy tests which showed that I wasn't pregnant).

Eventually waiting turned to puking and puking turned to more waiting—waiting for the madness

of my *hyperemesis gravidarum* (extreme nausea and vomiting) to end; waiting for my baby to be born and for my family to be complete.

All my life I have waited, and it has just recently occurred to me that I now have much of what I waited for so desperately—everything that I sought to feed my soul and make me whole again and the wondrous new life that I dreamed of and worked so hard to create. I have a husband who loves me

(even if not always in the ways I expect), two beautiful children, and a life-giving career. I have a home that is safe and a community where I belong.

And I wonder, "What now?"

What do I do now that I have everything I spent my whole life waiting for? How do I transition from constantly looking to the future and waiting for

something better than now, to a place of intentional gratitude in which I savor the beauty of each moment and consistently treasure the challenges and wonderfulness of today? 

—Sarah Blanchard

But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40:31



J. Doyle Penrose, *Presence in the Midst*

I said to my soul, be still, and wait
without hope
For hope would be hope for the
wrong thing; wait without love,
For love would be love of the wrong
thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the
hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not
ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and
the stillness the dancing.
T.S. Eliot

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Two Dreams

Though recognizing and honoring Gods' leadings to wait has long challenged me, I hadn't been able to think of a related story worth telling in "Minding the Light." Then one morning I woke from two significant dreams.

In the first, I was playing a ball game with another person.

Though the ball remained on the floor the whole time, it bounced off the walls of the small room, as in handball. One of us would roll the ball away, and the object for both of us was to then catch the ball after it had begun to bounce off the walls. Whoever caught the ball threw it the next time.

At one point in the game my sensibilities (it that's the word) changed. I decided that I would no longer run around trying to catch the ball, but rather would stand and wait for it to come to me, knowing that any ball that I was meant to catch would come to me. It wasn't that I was commanding this to be so, but rather that I was newly recognizing that this was so. I was newly aware that, by my running around trying to anticipate the ball's route and angle, I wasn't in a position to receive it easily, as I would be if I simply observed its path and was ready to catch it, if and when it came to me.

Throw after throw after throw I caught the all, and every throw from then on was mine. The ball came to me at some point in every toss, all while my opponent continued to race around, trying to align with the ball's route. That was the first dream.

In the second dream, I, a non-swimmer, had fallen into a deep body of water, with no one else around. Oddly though, I wasn't afraid. I had a kickboard, as non-swimmers sometimes use in pools, but didn't need it. I was calmly upright in the water, as if I were standing in water that only came a bit above my waist. The kickboard was not what was supporting me.

Then I found myself near a kind of dock high above my head. I spotted and grabbed onto a board that extended out from the dock, still above my head but just within my reach. But rather than trying to pull myself up, as the people who had gathered around were urging me to do, I just waited. Then, turning myself at a diagonal to the dock, I simply slipped effortlessly out of the water and onto the dock, through no power of my own. It was clear that changing my orientation to the dock (and to my goal of getting onto solid ground) was key.

Both dreams involved quiet, expectant waiting, followed by a simple knowing of what to do, and culminating with near-effortless solutions. The feeling on awakening, which I return to every time I think of these dreams, was one of complete trust and gentle peace. 🔥

—Laurie Hoff Schaad



Chagall, *River Without Banks*

Patience is not sitting and waiting, it is foreseeing. It is looking at the thorn and seeing the rose, looking at the night and seeing the day. Lovers are patient and know that the moon needs time to become full.

Rumi