

MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal

CHAPTER 6: WHAT EXPERIENCE COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE PHRASE "SACRED SPACE"?

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

John Woolman

Na Rae

Sacred space is where grace abounds

Where love triumphs over apathy

Where compassion melts a hardened heart

Where the prayers of a small child meet a tender God.

She was five when she plunked herself in front of the piano and proceeded to play Fur Elise. . . flawlessly. In contrast to the other medically needy children that we had fostered, Na Rae was from economically able and educated parents. The advanced technology, however, necessary to repair her fragile and sickly heart was not available in her home of Seoul, Korea.

For months preceding her arrival, my family anxiously awaited our new 'daughter', praying daily for safe travels and courage to make the transition to a new home, new language, new people, strange food, as well as the inevitability of open heart surgery and fairly extensive recovery time. My youngest daughter, Gillian, could hardly contain her anticipation as they were but 6 weeks apart in age and Na Rae would be attending kindergarten with her.

Our prayers shifted considerably upon her arrival in the U.S, often being reduced simply to tearful pleas of "why" or "help". This self-possessed little dynamo was unhappy with everything in her new surroundings, ourselves included. For well over the first month the rapport and bonding for which we had worked and hoped, which was vital to any form of successful surgery and

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recovery, was not happening.

If ever we had labored to love and win the trust of anybody, it was here, but Na Rae seemed to stand resolutely impenetrable. I was dismayed and discouraged. Gillian was crushed and ready to give up trying.

About six weeks into what was expected to be a 4-6 month commitment I heard Gillian sobbing from the top bunk in the small bedroom that she shared with Na Rae. She had been scratched in a little girl catfight. Out of sheer fatigue and frustration I resisted entering but stood outside of the room and waited. What transpired next was

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.

akin to the heavens opening up with angels singing in glorious abandon and golden light illuminating the scene. I heard a tiny voice in broken English utter, “I sahry Gil.” Na Rae stood on her bottom bunk and laid her hand on Gillian’s back.

That redemptive moment transformed a dimly lit tiny pink room into sacred space. The days that ensued attested further to the reality of God’s hand in the process of that inner healing. It was as if a shell had cracked from which a newly transformed happy child began to emerge. Her heart seemed to grow exponentially and we all reveled in the change. Na Rae became a beloved family member whom everyone adored – cheerful, considerate, grateful and fun. She radiated life and enthusiasm. In mid-December, two weeks after this incident, with valor and grace, Na Rae underwent open heart surgery, recovering as well as the doctors could ever have anticipated. 🔥

– ASW

Held by Water

“I am haunted by waters.” Like a song, the last refrain of the movie *A River Runs Through It* pulled at my heartstrings and released a flood of tears and buried longing. Surprised by my response, I realized that I ached for the rivers of my youth.

I was born on the Rogue River in Southern Oregon. Too young to connect with this broad body of water, somehow by osmosis, the calm seeped into my soul. After seven years of moving from the Northwest to the Midwest and back, our family settled in Plain,

Washington. Set in the wilds of the Northern Cascades, Plain was the antithesis of its name. The deep green spikes of Douglas Fir and Ponderosa Pine clung to the back of the mountains like a cowboy clinging to his saddle, and the Wenatchee River cut a snakelike path through the valley.

My dad claimed three pristine acres on the Wenatchee and began to build. Our home perched above the river; a bird’s nest pieced together with the help of friends, strangers, and borrowed materials. I grew up roaming the valley, often alone, but never lonely. How could I be lonely? I was in the sweet thick of mountain honey. In the quiet of my room I could hear the river’s song, and my heart hummed along like a bee.

This bend of the river grew, as I grew, into a refuge. The river’s seasons mirrored my adolescent moods. Raging torrent in the late Spring turned to rushing laughter in the hot of summer and fall. Winter brought such a peace. With each blanket of snow, the sounds of the water quieted until I could almost feel it hibernating, waiting for the roar of Spring.

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When my heart ached and I could barely hold the weight of my thoughts, I would jump off the school bus, run to the river and kneel at its banks. A small country church neighbored our property, and when the warm sun would creep across the sleepy congregation, the river would call to me and my mind would wander along its rocky banks.

Living next to this natural metaphor I knew that I was inextricably linked to everyone. When I met roadblocks, the river reminded me that there is always a way through. Herman Hesse describes a river in Siddhartha that holds all of humanity in its ceaseless and cleansing flow. This is the Wenatchee to me, a place where the rush of the water, coupled with the quiet solitude, gave us kids full permission to cry, scream, sit, reflect, laugh, swim, build deep friendships, dream, fish, float and daily commune with God. Isn’t that everything a sacred space should hold?

Though I dearly love my West Hills Friends community, when the sun shines and the chickens call during a warm summer’s day, my heart longs to shake these walls and slip into a silver stream. Like a fish, I am drawn to the life-giving source, ever flowing, moving, growing. I am haunted and held by water.

Psalm 23 (Townley paraphrase)

The Lord is my Shepherd
I shall not want.
The shepherd says,
“Lie down in green pastures.
Sit beside still waters.
Restore your soul.” 🔥
– Jill Townley


Climbing Trees

So close and so far.
Standing there,
I breathe deep.

The smooth bark caresses my feet,
Beginning my upward climb.
Daring to reach for one more branch
One foot after another.


Leaves rustle together,
Birds sing their sweet songs
of yesterday.
The voice of nature is loud and clear.
One foot after another.

The rhythm of the branches drives me on.
Reality turns into a speck
Waiting for me at the ground.
Not caring where I'm going
or how I'm getting there.
One foot after another.

Stuck on the sap of what use to be,
Slipping on a branch whose time has passed,
Smelling the scent of tomorrow,
Moving on.
One foot after another. 
— Graci Huber

travelers, visitors, and residents over the years. The coming changes required that this tree be cut down and all trace of its structure removed: it was in the way.

Early on that rainy blustery morning, I donned my black rain pants and rain coat over layers of warm clothing, latched all my Velcro, and went up to the tree to be a witness. I stood in silence, observant of every event and step of the removal of this tree. People passed by, merely glancing at me on their way. The work crew recognized me and assured themselves I was OK and standing at a safe distance, and they kept on their task.

tree's being had been scattered, released, and was no longer here. The short moments where my life and attention had beheld that tree were now over. I had honored it the only way I know: by giving my presence. For that morning, I was in sacred space. 
— Carol Bosworth

Tell us Your Story

The query for our next chapter is, “When has minding the Light led you to a change of heart, despite your initial resistance?”

Tell us your story in words, photos, art, music, video, or. . . ? We publish stories as told to the extent that they fit within our guidelines (see Guidelines box).

Story Deadline: 5/11/12.

If you have a story but don't feel able to communicate it, let us know and we'll send a Story Catcher to work with you.

My Safe, Sacred Spaces

For me, a sacred space is usually a quiet place. It is any space where I stop what I am doing to listen or talk with God. There was a sacred space for me, a very long time ago when I was still single. It was a quiet beach in Marin County in California. In fact, I was alone. It was a wonderfully safe place where I was able to freely, angrily yell openly at God. Now, I don't even remember my reason for being so angry, and it is unimportant. What is important is that that beach was such a beautiful, safe sacred space. There was another safe, sacred space in southwest Portland down in a wooded (tiny) valley with a creek in Woods Park near Capitol Highway and Taylor's Ferry. I would go there in

The Tree

Is something sacred because we, or others, hold it sacred? Or is something sacred because it IS?


Knowing as I do that there are multitudes of answers to this question, I can still be bashful about acting on my answer in public.

Two weeks ago at my living community, several events marked the beginning of what will be a long process of structural renewal. A particular event struck me with a call to be a witness to a death—on that day, the death of a blue spruce, a landscape tree that had grown up as our community had and which sheltered birds and shaded our summer farm market table and eased the eyes of

Few people understood what my standing there meant.

And so I stood in silent attention to the passing of every bit of that tree's solid being and every scrap of its material familiar self, even the last three cones which I gathered to take with me to my space elsewhere in this community. I watched the scudding clouds overhead, where the breath of wind and breath of tree mingled, inseparable. I watched the machinery and human laboring that pulled every root out of the earth where living ground and living tree had been interwoven.

After three hours of silent watchful standing (and shivering), I ended my witness, aware that the

a confused state, sit on a log in the creek — and, just 'be'. I felt so close to God there. The list of places could go on. . . When I am in a Sacred Space, I feel I am in a church. 

– Barbara Reynolds

Sacred Space

I worked for a week at a project near the town of Needles. Its purpose was to clean up an incursion of hexavalent chromium seeping underground toward the Colorado River upstream from where the City of Los Angeles draws its drinking water. But there was a problem. The local Mojave tribe claimed the pipeline cut through its sacred space, the Mystic Maze, a series of furrows created by the ancient ones before the dawn of human memory. The project manager showed me an aerial photograph. He told me it was best visible at dusk or dawn, when the shadows were right. So, one evening I stood on a hill and looked out over the desert, but I saw nothing.

This got me thinking about sacred space. Are some things more sacred than others? Sure, it's nice to think that everything is sacred, but if everything is sacred, then nothing is sacred. For something to be sacred, it must be set aside, distinguished from the things that are profane, or at least mundane.

My job took me to environmental clean-up sites in small towns all over America. I decided I would spend my off hours looking for the sacred places everywhere I went. Sometimes I went on intuition. Sometimes I inquired from the locals.


Sacred Mountain

Under a gray sky shaped like God's hand
A sea shore gentle and fresh
Bright light from heaven shining through the sleeves
On precious kindred dear

Leaving tumult behind
A place of rest, rebirth and renewal
Of new-found realization that life's journey need not be frozen in time
Abiding beside still waters

Mountains are seen differently by birds
Song birds in suburbia surprise the newly arrived
Sweet sounds that are a gift from nowhere
In a journey from place to place

A hill of many characters
Rocky, sinking, impassable
Lush, green, remarkable
Reflecting back on the waters, silent witness of miracles

Easy to forget that which is most important
When far away from that Mountain Lake
Relinquish all worry and fear
Entrusting all to God's care by the still waters of that place. 

– Allyn Dhynes

Hilltops were often sacred. If there was a cross on a hilltop I would usually find that the natives considered the place sacred long before the cross was erected, and the Christians were just picking up on energy already established. Point in case: Portland's own Council Crest, so named because the elders of the tribes used to council there, laying the foundations of peace between them. Later it was thought the name came about because elders of the various Christian churches met there to discuss the evangelization of the city.

I would climb to the top of every sacred hill and place a small cairn of stones. Burial mounds, old colonial graveyards, caves, certain bodies of water, places where

mysterious orbs of glowing light were sighted, were all deemed sacred, or at least spooky.

Conversely there are places that have been profaned by human activity. Wounded Knee comes to mind, or the site of the Whitman massacre near Walla Walla, Washington. Like many others I picked up an eerie vibe at Chaco Canyon, where the Anasazi people built a complex civilization, then abandoned it suddenly, as if fleeing some unnamed predator.

A shaman takes ordinary objects — wood, deerskin — and bends them into a drum. He plays it for many years at ceremonies and the drum becomes sacred. People gather in a certain place to sing, pray, dance, sit in collective

silence, merging their energies, longings, joys and fears. The vibrations gather and linger. You walk into such a place and you can feel it.

Not all things and places are sacred. If we start by making our bodies and hearts sacred, we will leave some holiness in the things we touch, the places we go as we travel through our lives. 🔥

– Jim Nail

Better View

When my son Eric graduated from college in Malibu, California, he took his first job as youth pastor of the church he had been attending for four years. I visited that church several times and was struck by something strange every time. The rather new, imposing, richly designed sanctuary of that church was built on a bluff overlooking the ocean. It was a billion-dollar view. But the pews all faced in, toward a wall, away from the ocean. If I sat in the right spot and craned my neck toward a back wall, I could look out the picture windows onto the ocean vista bordered with waving palm trees, while the pastor talked up in front. I wondered if he or his predecessor had decided on this configuration. Maybe the original pastor had thought, "I can't have this view competing with my reading and interpretation of the Word of God." Eric agreed that it was a strange way to situate a sanctuary.

One Sunday morning in October, an hour before the church service was to start, an enormous ravenous wildfire, many stories high, raced down the main route through Malibu Canyon. When it

hit the open air of the west coast, it lit upon the first thing it came to: the wooden steeple of the church. It was only a few minutes before the whole building was on fire. The few people who were setting up for church escaped before the flames dwarfed and devoured the two-story church, its administration building and its lush landscaping, with exotic flowers and fruit trees. All of that was burned to ash in a few minutes.

When Eric was a baby in Oregon, he saw spruces waving outside our window, and he said, "Trees say bye." Something caught in my throat at the time, and I knew it would be a hard road for such a poet. "That's right," I told him; "trees say hi, too."

A month after the fire, I came to visit the remains of the church. Eric mentioned with a wink that the head pastor and an architect were already drawing out a rough sketch of the new church, to be built on the ruins of the old one, but this time with the pews facing the ocean. Eric was no longer in a big office of his own, overlooking the garden with its lemon and persimmon trees. He had a tiny room in a trailer overlooking the black, ghostly foundation where the church had sat.

He and I walked sadly across the parking lot, which had liquefied and resolidified strangely in the fire. As we mounted the wide concrete steps to the foundation, we passed a rainbow-chalked heart with a peace sign scrawled inside. The wildfire had left nothing of the church itself but a bombed-out landscape of charred Bibles, a few folding metal chairs and here and there some black

timbers, like piles of burnt matchsticks. But out past the devastation was the view, better than ever, the sky and ocean with arms outstretched, gracious, with seabirds, palm trees and waves, all waving at us. 🔥

– Margaret Kellermann

Inward Sacred Space

I have always been directionally challenged, and I'm thankful for this because twice when I was lost, I found something sacred.

Many years ago, I took a year off from nursing and lived in Great Britain. While touring France, I lost my way and somehow found myself in the Taize Community. It was near Easter time, and I stayed for a week in a loving, spiritual community surrounded by the beautiful Taize music one often hears at West Hills Friends.


Another "getting lost experience" profoundly changed my life. I was 35 years old and living in Chico, California. It was a difficult time. My life felt shattered and broken and I needed to change. I'd recently had a vivid dream of waking up in the middle of the night and seeing a shadow of myself hanging in the closet. This shadow self had a rope around her neck and was dead. I wasn't frightened by this vision. Surprisingly, I felt joyful because, to me, the dream represented the possibility of the dying of the old, small self to make room for a newer Self to emerge. So, a few days later, off I went to Chico University to attend Pacific Yearly Meeting. I was ready to do some real soul searching to change my life because what I was doing

wasn't working. I was seeking spiritual help and guidance.

It was good to be among Friends at Pacific Yearly Meeting. One morning after breakfast, I walked down several hallways looking for the worship-sharing group on anger management that I had signed up for. Thinking I'd found the right room, I walked in and sat down in a vacant chair in a circle where about six people were gathered. We sat in silence for what seemed the longest time, and I wondered why no one spoke about anger management. Finally, it dawned on me that I had wandered into the wrong room! By then, it was too late to do anything about it, but I was beginning to feel peaceful in that room, so I just settled into the silence and lost all track of time. Gradually, I became aware of this light shining through me and an incredible loving Presence holding me. Tears streamed down my face as I realized God was there and loving me even with all my flaws. I was in the right place; an inward, sacred space where God's healing love was flowing through me.

Needless to say, this was a mystical, life-altering experience, and it happened in an ordinary classroom in a university, not in a dazzling cathedral or on a mountaintop. I was seeing with new eyes and feeling very grateful, alive.

I began to understand the connection between inward spirituality and outward action in the world. I learned in my heart that the ultimate task for me is to try to love others in the same way I know God loves me. I frequently

fall short of this task, but I keep trying because of that encounter with God and other glimpses now and again. 

– Margie Simmons

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Email your requests and questions to:
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The Hill

When I was in grade school, West 37th Avenue came to an abrupt end. There was a steel guardrail to mark the limits of civilization. Beyond the pavement, the ground was covered with weeds and tall grass. A path, curving like a question mark, slipped past the authority of the guardrail. That path rose with the slope of the Hill.

There wasn't much to entice you upwards. There was no beckoning destination. The trees that grew above the scrubland were uninviting, nothing more than a jagged smudge of middle scenery.


The forest was bigger than it appeared from the street. It was home to all the mysteries and wonders of a temperate rainforest. Some days, we went to the creek. It was the home of frogs, and insects that skated impossibly over the surface of the shallow water. Some days, we went to the sandy cliffs. We would dig into the

vertical surface with the screwdrivers we brought from home. The sandstone crumbled, and fossilized seashells fell into our hands: petrified clams and the graceful spiral of primeval snails. We stalked each other through forest shadows with carefully collected arsenals of pinecones. We ran where the path was widest, for the sheer animal joy of movement.

This was the playground of my childhood. We called it, the Hill. When we were children, we didn't know to call it sacred. It was our summer hunting ground, a place without grownups or boundaries.

When I was twelve, my family moved halfway across the country. One summer, we came home to visit. The guardrail was gone. The pavement of West 37th Avenue extended to the top of the Hill. Most of the trees were gone. They had been replaced by side streets and fire hydrants.

My family was inside a car that smelled like cigarettes and Freon. It was the first time all four of us had been on the Hill together. We drove in silence. There were no houses to be seen. There were no lawns or gardens. It was an empty neighborhood of bare earth. It was surreal. Later, we were told that a developer had put sewer pipes and electrical conduit into the ground. He paved the streets. Then, he ran out of money.

At twelve, my vocabulary was insufficient. But looking back, I think that's when I knew that the Hill had been a sacred space. The loss of that space was worse than robbery. I grieved it like a death. 
– Mike Huber

Under a Pine Tree

In the summer before my senior year in high school, a friend of mine brought her Bible out and we read it together on the grass strip in front of her house. That was the first time I had read a Bible.

After that, I got a Bible and read it quite a lot. I read through the New Testament. I prayed and talked to Jesus.

One night, as I lay in bed, I imagined Jesus under the pine tree that overhung into our yard. He was sitting on a piece of the gate that had fallen apart and my Dad had put out there. He said, "Well, I'm back, but I'm not sure what I need to do next."

In college I took a Comparative Religions class as an elective. The Professor, Dr. Clark, invited me to his office to talk one time. He said he had been a minister but went on to become a professor. I told him I had read the New Testament but the part where Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me..." seemed out of character, and I said, "I don't think He ever said that."

Dr. Clark reviewed the historical sequence of The Gospels and said that John, where the quote came from, was unlike the other Gospels in the style of Jesus' speech and it was also written much later than the other three. "Historically, Jesus probably never did say those words," he explained.

There is a group of pine trees at the top of the hill, about a half-block from our house. Sometimes I go up there and stand next to one of the trunks. I listen to the wind

rushing through the needles. I look at the view. Jesus is there with me. 🔥

*John 14:6 (NIV)
– Charles T

Reflections on Sacred Space

I first attended Meeting for Worship in a small house in Flagstaff, Arizona. When I entered the gathered meeting, there was a hush that felt palpable. The silence was like the cool, quiet of a cave; like a living thing, it embraced and supported me.

My first labyrinth walk was at dusk during a retreat. The labyrinth, nestled in a clearing in the forest, consisted of three spirals with a space in the center. Luminarias were set up around the paths. The walk was very emotional for me; I prayed, cried, laughed, railed, and praised. Eventually, feeling purged and free, yet exhausted, I lay down in the labyrinth's center. Out of the dark, women appeared with a cot mattress and blanket. Lying there, surrounded by the candles, and tall pine trees, I felt I was on holy ground. I was sure that this was the feeling that great cathedrals, with their tall, circular pipe organs, were trying to capture.

In my Friends' Meeting in Tucson, there were three other families that were very close to mine. We spent holidays and other special times together. During Meeting for Worship, seeing one of these Friends next to me or across from me, I felt connected to the Sacred through my connection to them.

Recently, lying in bed, watching my grandson sleep, feeling my love for him, I had an overwhelming awareness of God.

I reflected on the searching I've done; of Christianity, Hassidism, the Kabbalah, the Tarot, the Muslim faith, Buddhism, etc. I'm glad that I've studied and practiced so many paths; I've learned and gained much from them. Yet, in that moment next to Isiah, my understanding of God as love was more real and intense than anything I've found in my searching.

Considering these experiences, I realize that while space is important in my perception of the sacred, often my consciousness of the Divine is brought about, or helped along, by my relationship with others. In Flagstaff, the Friends already gathered in silence created the holy hush. The atmosphere at the labyrinth was enhanced by those who cared for me. In Tucson, when seeing a beloved Friend in Meeting, I sensed the Spirit move between us, and through us and itself. Feeling the love for my grandson so physically -- as fullness and overflowing in my chest, as tears in my eyes, as a softening of muscles -- I knew that I was feeling God.

A sense of sacred space enhances my ability to experience the transcendent. It is conducive to feeling safe, unclenching, and letting go. It centers me in the essence of what I am longing for. I've had many experiences of sacred space on my own, especially in nature. Yet it is often when experiencing God in others that I am most aware of an encounter with that Mystery in which I live, and move, and have my being. 🔥

– Mica Coffin

My Most Sacred Space

This morning I woke up in a temple – my body. I woke up and thanked God for this gift of flesh. Sometimes, I treat my body like a utility vehicle, driving around until a light on the dashboard alerts me, “You live in the Temple of the Holy Spirit! Show her some reverence!” It’s hard not to override my body’s messages, even in Quaker Meeting.

Often in Open Worship the seating disrespects my spine, and my back cramps, or even spasms. At first attempting to remain still, I finally allow myself to fidget. Surprise! God does not cast me out of the meeting house. Even when my stomach is growling, and my muscles are zinging, I can have a season of worship. Luckily, the meetinghouse is a place full of love and acceptance.

For years, I wore my own body like a house of disappointment, disregarding her need for sunshine or shade. I might have joked that a realtor would advertise my temple as a fixer-upper. Lately, I am gently changing my attitude toward my body. While doing this, I find it necessary to listen to what my body needs, and how it feels right now.


My sprees of self-improvement can lack follow-through. I forget, ignore, or even try to silence my body. This week I slept too little, worked too hard, and relied on caffeine, or analgesics to mask the ill effects. Disease and pain can slow me down. It becomes difficult to love and serve as I long to. I lose momentum.

Instead of giving up, I can gently renew my devotion to my Sacred

space, attempting to listen even when the voice within is shrill with pain. I meet the Inward Teacher right here in my weakness. My body is a Mystery School, and I’m a student.

This week I also prayed, walked, practiced Qigong (an exercise like Tai Chi), and ate good food, attending to what my body needed. Nightly, pictures danced behind my eyelids, telling me stories as I slept. I don’t know how the dreams come, or even why I enjoy Qigong so much. The more I pay attention to my body, the more I realize the unique wonders I carry.

I will die. Where will these wonders go when my body expires? Will my puny temple expand like the Milky Way, so that the ceiling is no longer the top of my head, but the far stretches of the starry cosmos? The greatest genius cannot answer my question for certain.

Even if scientists find natural causes for every bodily mystery, life will still give us wonders beyond reckoning. Great labyrinths in my brain enfold every moment I’ve lived, and every thing I’ve seen, heard, and done. Undulate parabolas of DNA enable hordes of bygone ancestors to live within my cells. As I review these mysteries, I feel awe and respect for every body, every one a shrine. Tonight I will sleep in a temple – my body – my most sacred space. 

– Claire Nail



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Message in the Labyrinth

Labyrinths have always been sacred space to me, whether I’m walking the path in silence or to quiet music, alone or with fellow travelers, seeking an answer to a challenging question or simply seeking a deeper connection with God. Walking the labyrinth takes me deep into a place of inner stillness, as it has for countless seekers down through the ages. As I walk, I feel connected, not only to God and to my own soul, not only to those walking beside me, but also to those who have walked in probably every continent across untold centuries. For me, a labyrinth is a physically small space that opens up into indescribable vastness.

Labyrinths are unicursal, meaning there is only one path in to the center, and that same path is also the only route back out. Unlike mazes, that are designed to trick the walker into getting lost time after time, labyrinths are actually designed to facilitate the walker getting “found”. The center of the labyrinth represents God.

Theoretically, one cannot get lost on a labyrinth; one simply follows the path in, at whatever pace and in whatever manner one chooses, and then, when ready, follows the same path out. And yet, people do get lost. And that, too, is part of getting found. For on the labyrinth, everything becomes metaphor, for those so inclined.


On this particular day, I entered the labyrinth with a question that had been haunting me for a long time: was I to end my relationship or to remain in it? I was torn, for though my inner voice seemed to tell me loud and clear to leave,

loyalty made me question and resist what I was hearing. I had felt torn for some time between loyalty to my partner and my longing to draw closer to God. I kept questioning, did the two have to be in conflict? Wasn't there another way?

This was the question with which I began my labyrinth walk that day. In a matter of minutes, I was startled to find myself walking out, having never even come close to the center! I laughed nervously, and without actually leaving the labyrinth, turned around and headed back in.

This time I kept my eyes locked on my feet as I took each step, making sure that I wasn't straying across lines, and thus potentially changing directions. In very short order, I again saw that I was about to walk OUT of the labyrinth! This was virtually impossible. I stood stock still, stunned. And I listened. What I heard was, "Sometimes you have to go all the way out before you can reach the center."

I had my answer, in a way that I couldn't question. I walked all the way out of the labyrinth this time, and turned to face the entrance. Letting God know that I had heard, that I knew that I would not be able to draw closer to God until I had left this relationship, I again began to walk in. I reached the center without a hitch.

I followed through on what my inner voice had been telling me for some time, knowing that I could trust it, no matter what my loyalty said. And I've never regretted it. 
 – Laurie Hoff Schaad

*My body
 is sacred space,
 home
 for the heart of God*
 Nancy Gibbs Richard, Multnomah MM


Sacred Spaces

Recognition of sacred space depends on my ability to see it: to be open to it, aware of it, and be present with it. Yes, I can name the ocean, the mountains, the many places where I have experienced the Sacred in nature, had a deep spiritual experience, or been with a person who radiated love. When I remember those times I have been aware of sacred space, whether it be a physical place or an experience within me, it is clear to me that I was a part of what was sacred, that somehow all was gathered together, me included, and all was connected with the Divine which was clearly within, through, and surrounding all. And I was a part of it.

I have experienced this in three ways. The first, an experience of nature like the day in the early Spring when I was out walking and suddenly everything was green, a deeply vibrating multitude of greens, all connected within Spirit, with God, extending throughout time, and I was walking in the air within the vibrations. I was not the usual me and was absolutely connected through a sense of oneness with the Divine. The second occurs during meditation when suddenly I am aware of a new dimension, new information, or a different angle on something so that a situation that previously was challenging is now totally clear. A third occurs with other people when the connection between us

becomes deep and powerful and the sense of God's presence is strong. I also remember in childhood when I was privileged to meet and stand right beside people who genuinely radiated love (Allan Hunter, Muriel Lester, and Kagawa) and in each case felt changed by their presence. I remember feeling lit up within, full of love and awe, and then after we parted it slowly faded away. Each person was deeply spiritual, an amazing leader of that time, and I was a very fortunate child.

An experience of the sacred either bursts in upon me or emerges from deep within worshipful silence. It might be about space around me or space within me. Experiencing sacred space depends on my being open to it and fully present with it.

At age 68 I am newly aware of my body as a miracle. My body is a gift, to be carefully cared for and gratefully experienced, whether walking, hearing, tasting, or seeing. These two eyes--how does an eye work? How do two work together? And how do they work with the brain, and connect to muscle and movement? And I have an ear, a heart, a foot, a . . . How do they function? How did they come to be? And how did I come to be? What is this life about? And the mystery of love: flowing into us, passing through us, and outward to others. I, my body, my life, and my soul: they are sacred. Sacred. With awe and in wonder, I move through each day increasingly aware of the sacred around me and within. It is everywhere. How much can I be open? 
 – Pat M.

A Medley of Sacred Spaces

While allowing my mind to savor and roam through the idea of “Sacred Space,” several memories formed almost simultaneously. So much for roaming. . .

St. Meinrad Seminary. The first memory took place at St. Meinrad Catholic Seminary/Monastery in Southern Indiana. My good friend Joseph, who had been a student there, suddenly got a “hankering” (leading) to go to Sunday night mass, which was open to any interested person. It must have been in the middle of winter because it was very dark as we drove from Louisville, Kentucky, to rural southern Indiana. We arrived a few minutes before mass and began walking into the cathedral lit only by a few candles and a few lights on a raised platform where empty chairs were placed in rows. A density of peaceful silence and presence met us at the door. There were approximately six other people who had come for mass. We found our seats and began to sink into silence. As we sat, a side door opened and about 30 monks filed in, wearing simple brown robes. They seated themselves on the platform. Then, with no accompaniment or beginning note, they began to sing to God. They sang, filling the cathedral fully with praises and prayers in all simplicity and beauty. They left as quietly and seamlessly as they had come in, leaving us in silence.

Mammoth Cave. The next memory is different and the same. When I was in my 20s, a friend and I heard about the “Wild Man Cave Tour” of Mammoth Cave, Kentucky. Our youthful

enthusiasm responded to the line, “Go where few have gone before.” So we scheduled ourselves for the next weekend. When we arrived and checked in, the woman registering us said, “You are really going to enjoy this!” I smiled knowingly, not understanding what she was talking about. Receiving our knee pads and helmets with headlights, my imagination began to roll. We met our guide and four other people in the opening of Mammoth Cave, looking like experienced spelunkers. For awhile we walked with other people who had no special equipment. We then split off to another path which was narrow, descending, full of boulders, and DARK. Slowly, we descended deeper and deeper, bending over to avoid the rock ceiling, climbing over large boulders down what mostly seemed like a path. I began to “hear” the depth of the SILENCE – first in my head, then in my chest, then in my belly. Then I heard/sensed something else. It was a “constancy” – an almost audible “sound.” I kept listening and realized that, along with my heartbeat, there was another sound. It, too, sounded like a heartbeat – quieter, slower, more powerful. I was overcome with gratitude for the welcoming of the earth, the Mother. I felt deeply, patiently held. We all stopped, turned off our head lamps, and listened to the alive silence of the earth.

Black Holes. The first time I heard about Black Holes in space, my attention turned on! These black holes open up at the “edge” of space and have in them the birthing of galaxies. There are explosions, fire, gases, darkness,

blinding light a most powerful sacred creation of whole galaxies.

Gratitude

In this Mantra of Breath

Spirit Cycles

Life Sustaining

Gift of Spirit

Until we pass from this body. 🔥

– Patricia Timberlake

Publication Guidelines

Stories: must be 500 words or less, and written in the first person by a member or attendee of West Hills Friends. Stories should be submitted in text format in the body of an email addressed to: mindingthelight@gmail.com.

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 safe websites such YouTube or Vimeo.

Easter Morning

This query about sacred space brought me many memories of remarkable places. Places recognized through space and time as holy sites, as thin places where the veil between this world and the sacred other is transparent and slight. I recalled walking the worn and ancient stone labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral beneath the stained glass rose window. I recalled an eerily silent two-hour walk through the ruins of Chaco Canyon, one raven the only sign of life. I recalled a small chapel on Crete, dedicated to St. Peter the Fisherman, where stray cats slept on the old wooden pews. And then I remembered this poem I wrote many years ago.

Easter Morning

I have looked everywhere.
I have looked for a long time.

I found you once
on a tidal marsh on Cape Cod.
Working there,
with souls more lonely than mine,
needing wisdom I didn't know I had.

I found you once in New Hampshire
in a small church,
the sun through cobalt, emerald, ruby and gold,
the air filled with sweet sopranos.


And trout fishing on early summer streams
deep in the woods,
the light a hundred little points,
the fish flashing out of the water.

You have come when I'm not looking,
yet my eyes, fully opened,
were ready.

I hear my daughter
laughing in the next room.
My house is full of pleasure.

I fill the wineglasses of friends
and wonder at the design that brought them
all to our home this night.

I breathe the clean air of a rainy northwest morning.
It fills my day with pine
and cedar and mud and lilacs.

I have looked everywhere.
I have looked a long time.
You have come when I am not looking. 
– Peg Edera

Somewhere Else

When I hear the words *sacred space*,
I think of a place I have visited
almost every day for fifteen years.
Some days, I stay only for a few
minutes and others for an hour or
more. While there, I sit in the
warmth of God's comforting
presence while something myster-
ious happens. Healing energy,
like a stream of living water, flows
through me, flushing painful
feelings from deep within and
washing them away as tears.

disappear without my conscious
intent, but I'm not a passive
viewer. I decide when to say the
next line of the Psalm, and when I
do, the imagery changes. And I
can consciously “import” images
from life and dreams.

As I recite the Psalm, my shepherd
leads me through beautiful
landscapes on a path that is
sometimes rocky and difficult. We
usually walk, but sometimes he
carries me when the way is too

When I leave, I feel
calm, refreshed and
centered.

The place I go is one
of those *thin places*
where this world
and the next seem to
blend together;
where God's
Presence is
powerful, like
warmth and Light
from the sun; where
meaning is visible
and the landscape
so beautiful that it
brings tears of joy.

The doorway to this
place is the 23rd
Psalm.


About 15 years ago,
I was led to say the
23rd Psalm as a
prayer, and I was
surprised to see
imagery while
praying that
illustrated the
words of the Psalm.
In the years since,
the prayer has
remained alive –
always changing,
yet interactive.

Images appear and

difficult, and sometimes we ride
horses or travels in boats. There
are mountains and rivers,
gorgeous skies, rocky cliffs and
seashores, and lush green past-
ures. There are pillars of fire and
valleys of death. There is daily
communion at God's Table with
people known and unknown . . .
people loved and once lost.
Throughout the prayer, healing
tears usually flow.


In this place, words are few and
far between. Images are the
primary language and knowing is
beyond words. It is one of those
places *where words come from*. . .
With few exceptions, the only
words I hear there are my own, as
I recite the Psalm.

While I was living in California, I
worked for five years with a
spiritual director who was also a
psychologist. She told me this
prayer was a gift that was
“exquisitely tailored” to my needs.
After Jesse died, I worked for five
years with a psychiatrist in
Portland who saw my prayer as a
place to escape trauma. He said
it's common for traumatized
people to go “somewhere else” in
their minds to escape. At the
same time, he saw a fascinating
healing process in the tears and
imagery.

I think both of my therapists were
seeing part of the truth. This place
is a sacred gift and *is* a place of
respite and healing from trauma –
but I don't think it was created just
for me, and I don't think it is
located in my mind alone. It is
also Somewhere Else, and I think
there are doorways near to
everyone who needs to go there
for healing. 

– Sally Gillette

The Glory of the Ordinary

In 2009 I was part of a community — a ministry school. One of the things that was set in the curriculum were days of reflection — times set apart for seeking the presence of God — creating sacred space. Some of my classmates went off to remote places — the forest, Mt. Shasta — the lake. I chose to stay home in my "cell". The offerings in the box below came out of the very quiet space of my own room and dialing down into the quiet of the sacred space within. 

Visit our website to see the beautiful photos contributed for this chapter.

www.mindingthelight.org

Contributions to Minding the Light for printing and mailing costs are much appreciated. Send your tax-deductible donation to:

West Hills Friends
P.O. Box 19173
Portland, Oregon, 97219

Note on the check the contribution is for Minding the Light.

Smiling inside my heart
Smiling at the peace
My pooch is sleeping in the quiet
Of the sunshine
I bathe in the warmth of the afternoon sun
Listening to the Sons of Korah
And soaked in the warmth of God's
Peace in the ordinary rhythm of the day
Your glory spreads out like warm
Melting butter
Peace, quiet —
Grace flow across the
Pathway of infinite Presence

Eating chocolate pudding
Again in the quiet of the ordinary
Your glory permeates me — the ordinary acts of being me
I purposed to drink from this moment
And the being me is good — sweet — satisfying
I purposed to seek You not closed off
And closeted because it is in the
call of the now —
the mundane ordinariness of life
that I live and move and speak
To dance in the NOW, let my soul dance
Around with The Spirit's invasion of my present moment
In the presence that I crave

Draw me and I will run after You
Run after You and your amazing liquid love NOW
I don't live in a cell or upon high places
Mine is an ordinary anchored to the earth place —
I live in the open exposed
It is in the earth place I must see —
Perceive — glimpse Your glory
— Toni LaCentra

Jacob's Dream

Yaakov went out from Be'er-Sheva and went toward Harran, and encountered a certain place.

He had to spend the night there, for the sun had come in.

And he took one of the stones of the place and set it at his head and lay down in that place.

And he dreamt:

Here, a ladder was set up on the earth, its top reaching the heavens, and here: messengers of God were going up and down on it.

And here:

YHWH was standing over against him.

He said:

*I am YHWH,
The God of Avraham your father and the God of Itzhak.*

*The land on which you lie
I give to you and to your seed.*

Your seed will be like the dust of the earth; you will burst forth, to the Sea, to the east, to the north, to the

Negev.

All the clans of your soil will find blessing through you and through your seed!

*Here, I am with you,
I will watch over you wherever you go and will bring you back to this soil; indeed, I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.*

Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said:

*Why,
YHWH is in this place,
and I, I did not know it!*

*He was awestruck and said:
How awe-inspiring is this place!
This is none other than a house of God,
And that is the gate of heaven!*

Genesis 28:10-17, translation by Everett Fox from the Five Books of Moses

MINDING THE LIGHT

CHAPTER 3: HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED GOD'S PRESENCE IN NATURE?
