

# Flow Afresh In Me

Judith Gottlieb

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## **Biography of Judith Gottlieb**

Judith was born in 1951, the third child of four. During her childhood, the family lived in Kansas City MO, Lawrence KS and Milwaukee WI. They vacationed in the mountains of Colorado and New Mexico, and the north woods of Wisconsin.

Judith studied languages and social sciences, and thought she'd work in some form of international relations. However a change in direction came after two years spent in Tanzania East Africa in 1971-73, where she attended the University of Dar es Salaam while her father was working on contract there. She became interested in appropriate technology, and decided to prepare to work in the areas of water supply and sanitation. It was her intent to return to East Africa to work, but that hasn't happened yet. She has spent the last 15 years working with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as a wastewater engineer.

She began attending Milwaukee Meeting in 1974, and became a member in 1978. With characteristic enthusiasm, she jumped in with both feet. Over the years she has edited the newsletter, convened Peace and Social Concerns, Finance and Ministry and Counsel, and served as Recording Clerk for her Monthly Meeting. She is the Recording Clerk and unofficial coordinator of pre-supper singing at Yearly Meeting.

Judy knits, gardens and reads science fiction. She loves to spend time with her many friends and hates to clean house but has gotten better about it. Judy has the gift of bringing music, laughter and smiles, truth and clarity, to friends personally and to Meetings gathered for worship and business.

## **Flow Afresh In Me**

Thou who art -- above and beneath all, around and within  
and between and beyond all,  
Thou art holy and nameless, ever present, ever loving, ever aware.

May we live and die in awareness of Thee.

Give us this day leaven for the lump of our lives.

Forgive us our forgettings, our blindnesses, our deafnesses, our cruelties--

As we forgive those who ignore or deny us and that which sees us not.

Heal us from our fears, our angers, our obsessions.

Lead us into right action

and protect us from dullness, dryness, and despair.

Warm us with thy grace, water us with thy hope,

and strengthen us with thy gentleness and power

Now and forevermore. Amen.

(Margaret Gottlieb)

Those are my mother's words. I speak today of some of my experiences of God, and what has helped and what has hindered as I have tried to live a Spirit-led life. I want to be absolutely straightforward about what I have learned in my life about Spirit, what I have doubts about, what I struggle with and what comes easily. I want to touch on truthfulness, mistakes, sexuality, forgiveness, despair, money, touch, and the importance of habits when trying to live in a loving way.

To give you a historical framework, my mother was raised Quaker in Indiana in a pastoral meeting. Her grandparents were all Friends. My father was Jewish, and being attracted to the teachings of Jesus, he converted to Christianity as a young man. I think it was also a rebellion against certain elements of cultural Judaism. In any case, imparting a spiritual grounding to their four children was important to both of my parents. My sisters and I were all two years apart, and our brother Sam was born three years after me. I remember Sam's trip home from the hospital.

My earliest memories of church are in Kansas City, where we lived in three different houses in as many years. Sometimes I went with my older sisters Elizabeth and Deborah on the streetcar. We would have something for the collection and a penny for the gum machine that dispensed little boxes with 2 Chicklets. That church served Communion frequently. I remember taking it when I was very small, with black and white people, brightly colored dresses, the smell of warm bodies, and singing "Break Thou the Bread of Life". Later in Lawrence KS we went to a Methodist church; in summer they would send us the bulletin midweek because I wanted to be able to sing the hymns and I had to practice them. I was eight when we moved to Milwaukee. This time the church was Congregational/United Church of Christ. The requirements were, a preacher my father could tolerate, and a good Sunday school for us. Denomination was unimportant.

My earliest personal experience of the power of God was when I was very mad at my sister Debby, and the family sat down to a meal, and as usual, had grace, or "good thoughts" as it was called in our family. I sat there muttering in my head "I won't say them, I won't say good

thoughts, I won't say them," because I was mad and I wanted to stay mad. I was astonished that at the end of the silence I wasn't mad any longer.

Another experience when I was seven or eight, I was walking down the street looking up at the leafy trees against the sky, and I thought, "I am here, it is important to remember this moment." As I think about it now, the experience was about choosing to be really aware and alive. I know that I practiced doing that for some time after that, the stopping and consciously trying to store the experience in my memory. I don't recall any of the other moments, but remember the process.

I remember sitting at Sunday dinner after church while my father read aloud some parts of Isaiah, or Psalms, or a speech from Gandhi, and later Martin Luther King Jr., or something worthy from the Congressional Record. We would sit smelling our plates, waiting for him to finish so we could eat. We now understand better what he wanted to impart to us, and we also laugh about it. At the time however we did not appreciate the LONG readings. Certain hymns were also a part of our family life; we'd sing them sometimes for grace and always on car trips. "The God of Abraham Praise," "Holy Holy Holy," "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" are the ones which come most to my mind.

In my Sunday school years and high school, I was nurtured by many caring adults in my church, and especially by the youth minister, Don Laue. I sang in the choir, and as a teen I attended youth leadership camp in the summer. It was very important to me to have contact with other young people who cared about the world. A man who had done interesting work abroad after WWII impressed me very much when I was 11 or 12; I wanted to do work like that when I grew up. My parents had also worked in Germany after WWII, my mother for the United Nation relief agency and my father for the U.S. Government, so interest in international work was also acceptable at home.

I don't believe that our success in nurturing the spiritual lives of young people should be measured by whether they choose the Religious Society of Friends as their spiritual home. I left the church that nurtured my spiritual growth, because I was drawn to silent worship. They did not fail because I left.

I feel more at home in traditional Christian churches than many unprogrammed Friends, because I didn't so much rebel against the theology as choose a worship form that suited me. I think I also just ignored the theology which didn't sit well with me.

My contact with the Divine has been direct since I was small. For me, Jesus was a teacher, an example, and a helper, but not God. I talked to God when I prayed, even when I was in a setting more oriented toward Jesus. I have always felt that Jesus was telling people to get in touch with God -- I don't think he ever wanted to be worshipped. However I know there are many people who think differently.

In my life I have questioned many things which are traditional truths -- whether it be that Bible stories are literal truth or even always spiritual truth, or that sex outside of marriage is bad, or that women belong only in home, church and school circles. I am too aware of cultural differences to believe that a culture's human constructs are the full and literal truth. When one is

a doubter like I am, it is a lot of work to sift out what part of older human tradition to affirm as solid and true for me. Sometimes I have wished I were more accepting of tradition, of rules; it would make life simpler.

Traditional truths are often couched in mythology or metaphorical story. When I use mythology or myth in this talk, I mean the metaphorical story or deeply connecting idea. I don't mean fabrication or lie. We humans swim in myth, whether we want to admit it or not. Many of the myths in our culture contradict one another. Some are paradoxical. I want to focus on three today. There's the myth that buying something/many things will make you happy. There's the myth that if you work hard enough, you too can have the perfect life. There's the myth of happily-ever-after in true-love stories.

Getting something new can be a wonderful treat, whether it is a gift from self to self, or from another to self. Yet resisting the power of material possessions to divert humans from the spiritual journey was a theme taught by Jesus and by Buddha. I find it in the Tao te Ching. Quaker teachings are strong in this area too. We may think these teachers speak of greed. That is not the only point. They warn us about attachment. Each of these spiritual traditions is clear in its warnings about attachment to material things.

We all affirm that being an adult means working hard in many areas -- earning income, housecleaning, caring for children, gardening, Meeting work or building social change. Still, the myth that if you work hard enough, you can have the perfect life is a terrible trap spiritually. It leads to exhaustion, taking loved ones for granted and a kind of deadening of spiritual vitality. Years ago a friend in Meeting loaned me a book on prayer, which I found very helpful in addressing this myth in the spiritual area. Nonetheless I struggle with this one, at work, in Meeting, in Yearly Meeting. I have a passion for trying to balance varying aspects of myself, which makes me particularly vulnerable. I am better at saying no than I once was, but I still feel an internal compulsion to take on tasks which are beyond my strength. Some dear friends in response to my holiday letter last year sent me a caption from their church bulletin which said: "Do not feel totally, personally or irrevocably responsible for everything. That's my job. Love, God."

I do think that we set up lessons for ourselves, in the areas we need to grow in. Not all life events are this kind of lesson, but a good many are. Learning how to say no is one of my lessons. The Spirit gave me a heart that was capable of sensing need far beyond my capability to respond in time and energy. Either I must learn how to say no and still feel the needs, or the sensitivity will diminish, just as scar tissue builds up after repeated injury. I see it as a natural way God would deal with my inability to limit my commitments. I think perhaps both are happening; I'm not as tender-hearted as I once was, and I say no much more often.

Back to Myth #3. There are people I respect who think some of the true-love fairy stories are really about the soul and searching for God, but I have not experienced them that way myself. True-love and happily-ever-after (whether in fairy story, pulp fiction or pop music) are dreadful hookers for a single woman like myself. After all, if I haven't found a true love and am not living happily ever after, there must be something deeply wrong with me. Reading the recent book *Flying Solo: Single Women in Midlife* has helped me to see how pervasive and destructive this

myth is to the self-esteem of women who are single. It also serves to keep women in bad relationships, for at least they're not single. One reason this myth has such power is that it touches on a deep core of need. Love, commitment and shared sexuality and touch are experiences which most humans long for.

I find it helpful to think about which myths I want to swim in, and which ones hold power in my life whether I want or not. And I wonder, which ones hold power for each of you?

I want to talk about truthfulness. Seeking to be honest is the core of growth, yet I am not one for whom truthfulness came easy. Lying has always been a temptation. I think it was crucial for me to feel approval and affirmation from others, so when I was doing something those others wouldn't like, I wasn't truthful about it. After some very painful experiences in my early adult life, I decided that a desire to hide a behavior or to lie about something was a red flag for me that I needed to look at the behavior. I simply couldn't tolerate speaking or acting untruthfully anymore. Now I balance the desire for approval from others against the interior discomfort I feel. Lying doesn't win; silence sometimes does, though not speaking about potential conflict areas is not a good long term choice. I cherish plain-speaking in others partly because it is hard for me.

Of course, one of the things it was hard to be truthful about was sexuality. I became a young woman in the midst of the sexual revolution (and the anti-war movement and later the women's movement). The sexual revolution had a major impact on my life experience. I was hungry for love, had raging hormones, and had poor boundaries -- so I was a vulnerable young woman. I wish I had been less vulnerable. I think matters are somewhat different for young people today, with the risk of contracting AIDS, though I'm sure that hormones are still strong and that they also are hungry for love and affirmation.

I think that sexuality is most meaningfully and best practiced in long term committed relationships but I haven't had that experience myself. I've had some medium term and some short term relationships. I do believe that monogamy is important, although I haven't always thought that, and was as usual unwilling to take other peoples word for it. I experienced enough short term non-committed sexuality to be able to advise against it, not just because of safety but also because of how it feels later. I know personally the cost of both "no shared sexuality" and "short term relationships", and cannot say one is always better than the other.

For sexuality and touch hunger are basic human needs. They are not aspects which one can "turn off". Some people seem to sublimate these needs successfully, but others can only do so by shutting down in many other areas as well. The strength of the need varies greatly between people, and at different times of life. I have a hard time subscribing to "one rule fits all situations".

Even non-sexual touch can be misused or problematic in what I call "imperialist touching" and "need bleed-through". "Imperialist touching" means I think that you are maybe a reserved person, but you really do need touch, so I'll give it to you for your own good. Some people are much more reserved physically, and we touchers should not assume that touch is welcome. It is very important to pay attention to the body language of other people, so you don't encroach upon their personal body space. Checking with people verbally is also a good idea. The second point is

that sometimes unmet needs bleed through, and this can be stressful for the person on the receiving end. We feel this in conversation as well, but with touch the sense of need becomes so tangible, we can feel ourselves pull away almost instinctively.

Still, my personal opinion is that in this culture most of us need a lot more touch than we get, and that a shortage of touch functions very much like a vitamin or mineral deficiency. We drag, we lose our bounce, we feel less energy, we hurt more. I certainly do. Often people who raise children get a lot of touch from their children, but there should be other legitimate shame-free ways to address the need for human touch. Jan Mara wrote a song, from which I'll sing the first two verses:

There's a quality taken for granted, no one seems to talk about it much  
But babies are known to wither and die, for the want of a loving touch.  
Children are blessedly simple, they cry out to be hugged and to be held  
But when we are grown, we're told to stand alone  
We're told to keep our hands to ourselves.

*Chorus:* Sometimes words will fail you,  
You have more than words at your command,  
You carry the power to love and to heal,  
Right there in your own two hands.

So often the touch of another raises doubt and suspicion in our head  
It must be some kind of come on, or a trick to try & get us into bed  
But I just want someone to hold me, why is that so hard to say?  
So we fight and fool around, and lay our bodies down  
And the need never seems to go away... *Chorus*

I have a lot to share about forgiveness. I have found that being forgiven for an action which caused another person deep pain is an amazing experience of joy and reconciliation. No doubt I have been forgiven many times for thoughtless acts; the kind which are just part of daily life. I have experiences to share -- two on the receiving end and one on the giving end. These involved good friends who were persons of spiritual depth and integrity. None of these involved abuse. I have also forgiven a family member and this had a much more subtle process, that I'll touch on briefly after the three stories with friends.

I felt the need to challenge a close friend on some behavior which I felt was dangerous for her. This led to great turmoil for both of us, which was mediated by our Meeting's Ministry & Counsel Committee. I found that some of the issues I was challenging her to address were also things I needed to examine in my own life. For 1-1/2 years there was bare civility expressed between us, and a loss of the warmth and trust which had been so characteristic of our friendship. Then at our Meeting retreat, mid afternoon, we were sitting with five or six others at a large kitchen table, discussing someone not present. I was uncomfortable with it and asked that we change the subject. Then I stood up, gave someone near me a quick shoulder rub and moved around the kitchen island to stir the soup. I looked across the island at my friend and saw sadness set into her face. Without thinking I moved around the island, put my arms around her shoulders and whispered in her ear "I am sorry for the pain my actions brought you". She turned around to me with tears in her eyes, and we held each tight and cried and said "I love you".

At the time and afterwards as I reflected on the experience, it felt as though the whole afternoon's events were shot through with mystery, that in some way all of us at that table were part of a play we didn't realize. How little we understand sometimes the rhythm of our dealings with others. I felt that the afternoon was prepared for us. I felt awed by mystery, by grace, by the Spirit.

The second reconciliation was for a much longer separation, and a more serious sin on my part. I had betrayed the love and trust of a longtime friend, and I had repeatedly lied about it. I can hardly believe now that I did those things, but I did. Here also, my Meeting did some clearness work with the friend I had wronged, and offered to do so with me as well, but I was so ashamed I couldn't talk to the particular friends who were offering to be on the clearness committee, though I did talk with others.

This friend and I had no contact to speak of for years. I did not feel I had any right to contact her. About eight years later she asked for some help with something. I was extremely grateful for the opportunity to try to make amends, and did try but was not very successful. I was heavily committed to many activities at the time and what she asked took a kind of psychic energy I didn't have enough of. So I felt grateful for the chance but thought I had muffed it for sure.

Another year passed, she called me in early spring, we talked of Friends General Conference, and somehow by the end of the conversation we were going to travel there together and even room together. I was amazed, excited, grateful, but still tongue-tied about the past. Like many of you I have great difficulty in addressing conflicts in my personal relationships. On the drive to FGC, we were talking and sharing music, and then I told her the story of my separation from my other friend and the reconciliation, that it felt like a miracle -- and I said, "just like our being together now is a miracle." I think I reached over and touched her hand on the steering wheel of the car. She raised my hand to her lips and kissed it saying, "yes it is". Or perhaps it was the reverse and I kissed her hand. For me the walls fell down. I cried, I told her how much I loved her, how sorry I was for my wrongful behavior, how much joy I felt that she could still care for me. That week at FGC was illumined with this sense of miracle, indeed the entire summer was. I spoke at the Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (FLGC) worship about these experiences of forgiveness, and what a release of joy and energy had accompanied them. I said that I looked forward to the release of joy and energy when I could finally forgive myself.

That hasn't yet come to pass, the self-forgiveness. You see, I don't think forgiveness is something which can be willed. You have to do your part of the work so you are ready -- but my experience is that the forgiveness itself comes in an act of grace.

The third experience is one where I forgave a dear friend whose actions had deeply wounded me. Three good and skilled Friends committed to labor with us. At the end of our fourth clearness committee session I realized that I needed to completely close off the connection with this person for awhile. We set a time some twelve months afterwards to check in with each other, and one member of our clearness committee met with us. I think it was six months later that, again in an unpremeditated act, I reached out to my friend saying "it is too hard to shut you out". The clearness process and the psychic distance we had maintained had done their work in me, and I could manage to connect with this friend without much pain.

I have found that the times-of-connection with each of these friends are not as frequent as before the break, and that one or the other of us may keep up a small barrier at times, but we can connect as deeply as before. Their continued love for me is a precious gift. I will always be grateful to those Friends who gave so generously of their time and energy for those clearness sessions.

These three experiences have several common elements, besides the joy of the reconciliation. There was recognition of the hurtful behavior and acknowledgment of the depth of pain the other person experienced. Friends' clearness proceedings were undertaken during the heat of the conflicts. There was a period of separation. The final moment of reconciliation unfolded without being planned.

My forgiveness process with my father was different. I think that processing strong hurts is very difficult when you either live with or have a strong ongoing connection with the other person. It is harder to have the kind of separation I had in my friendships. Support from others of the need for space is important. I came to see that my father was also on a spiritual journey in his life and that he wasn't perfect when I was born. During my childhood, there was little support for adults to learn better skills for handling stress and anger. He did mellow as he aged, and I also realized that I just loved him in spite of scars from earlier years. I did experience a gentle release over time.

I want to speak now about habit and living spiritually. It is another one of those paradoxes. We need to develop good habits of living, so that when we are not paying much attention or are too tired, we can still live in a loving way. Yet if we live only through the habits, we never really connect with our own life, and our loving actions lose their sweetness to others and to ourselves because we're not really there. Some habits can serve both purposes - good pattern and awakening awareness. Regular prayer, doing yoga and the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh come to my mind. But many habits are more mundane. I speak first about the ones I have trouble establishing.

In order to feel whole, I need to be involved in more than personal circles. I see as a student of history the importance of the societal struggle toward freedom and justice. My father also taught us that democratic government was a responsibility. I find my time so committed in other directions that this civic aspect of being whole is difficult to accomplish. Yet I've found that when I join with strangers in a shared interest or cause, it is joyful for me. The shared activity establishes a sound basis for overcoming fear of the unknown person. I hope that remembering the joy of the connection will make it easier to make the space.

I also struggle to build good habits of physical care. I'd much rather read than exercise. The exercise becomes more difficult as my weight goes up, and I need it more. I started yoga about two years ago, which suits me but isn't aerobic, so I bought an exercise machine. I know that the body and the spirit and the mind are all connected. For me, more exercise is a spiritual need and a depression prevention need. Yet it is very hard for me to build the habit.

Other habits have come easier for me. I give away between 20 and 30% of my gross income. I am not raising children and am relatively well paid so I'm not setting this up as some kind of



standard others should use to judge themselves. It is simply for me a habit which I established as soon as I began working. It is also my way of doing war tax resistance, since combined with owning a home, it reduces the federal income tax demand to about 8% of my income rather than 30+%. The roots of this habit go back to the time I spent in Tanzania in 1971-73 with my parents. I experienced people with very little money living meaningful lives. I learned that what really matters is access to basic things (food, shelter, education, healthcare), a sense of being constructive, and time with your community. I saw how far a little money could go (little from my U.S. salary perspective). So when I began earning a healthy salary and was switching from a student lifestyle, I planned to give away a certain amount each month, and changed my withholding forms so I would have the money. My experience is, if you want to give away significant portions of your income, you need to plan it. And it needs to become habit. It is a source of great joy, this ability to support work I believe in.

The habits of spiritual self-care for me seem to change. For many years, I truly needed weekly silent Meeting, and couldn't take much time away without really suffering a loss of perspective. Now that need is less acute. I still need to do regular retreats or workshops. I think my dryness of the last year is related in large part to having neglected the retreat habit.

Regular participation in a strong and vibrant Monthly Meeting has been a habit of 20 years. I have been grown by my Meeting and have helped to grow them. I have many times experienced the presence of grace, of connections that extend beyond time and space and physical being. I deeply treasure the friendships that are rooted in our shared community life. I think that a home spiritual community has been extremely important to me, and I would have found my home in another faith body if Friends had not been here for me. I have enough sense of kinship with other faith groups to have been able to do that.

Friendship is a spiritual habit for me. The most healing kind of love between peers, for both giver and receiver involves truly seeing the other, allowing them to be as they are, and experiencing love for them as they are. There is no substitute for spending time with your friends, truly enjoying their company and showing that enjoyment. It is not just "having a good time." It is fundamental affirmation, vitamins for the soul, and rest for the work-weary. All of us need it. So where you can give it easily, make the time. And if simple touch can be a part of that love, it's all the better.

Music making is a habit which provides deep nurture for me and is one of the easiest of all the spiritual habits. Nightingales traditionally gathered late Saturday evening during the Northern Half-Yearly and then Yearly Meeting weekends. We began gathering for full weekends 14 years ago. Those weekends are very important to me. Something which usually stays wound up tight in me can often let go during Nightingales. The combination of words with good melody and harmony goes much deeper than words alone. Whatever it is I bring to singing here at Yearly Meeting (including many of the songs) is a quality that was fed by Nightingales.

Gardening has been another spiritual habit which has grown in me over the last 5-7 years. It feeds my soul, creates beauty and allows me to connect with other people I might never have met otherwise. It also connects me with the earth, the insects and the raising of food, an ancient human activity.

Even with all of this richness, and my conviction that I have experienced Spirit working, I still struggle frequently with despair. I was fortunate that my midlife depression responded to medication, but there is a familiar low-level depression which I have learned to watch vigilantly. I am more vulnerable to both despair and depression when I am touch-hungry, when I am stiff because of not doing yoga, and when I've been pushing hard. Your vulnerabilities may well be different than mine. Others with a richness of touch in their lives may starve for solitude, which I am fortunate to have.

I work every day with wastewater treatment plants and those who operate them. Most of the people I work with I respect deeply. I work in an agency which is one of the best in the nation in environmental protection. It is heartening to me that many people I know through my work disagree with me politically but are on the same side as I am environmentally. But it is disheartening to me to know how inadequate our staffing level is to deal with the number of industrial discharges, and the diffuse urban stormwater and agricultural runoff. There's been a lot of turmoil within the agency as well which has made the last two years harder than any I can remember there, and with the present political climate, the staff shortfalls will likely get worse.

My despair is related to my understanding of our society's industrial nature, the reality of the workplaces out there in that "real world", and how we use and misuse materials that have serious consequences on the biosphere. Several years ago I was introduced to the work of Theo Colborn, a toxicologist who has focused on endocrine disrupters. These substances, when present in extremely low dosages at critical points in gestation, can affect the development of offspring. These effects have been observed in many different wildlife species, and she believes are also being found increasingly among humans. The number of endocrine-disruptive substances in wide use increased significantly in the middle of this century.

I met Theo Colborn because she gave a talk at our DNR (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources) Wastewater Statewide Meeting, and afterwards she and I spoke together for eight hours, with another DNR person. She told us stories about her life. We talked about our lives, our partners, our work, how she manages to keep doing her work. She is a wise and deep person, who understands how her theories and research agenda radically challenge the status quo. She told the story of how a Bush appointee to the Great Lakes Commission changed his mind. She said that her task, working with her group of interdisciplinary researchers, is to clearly show the transgenerational patterns and to change the kind of product testing we do to include these endpoints. Trying to figure out how to stop using the substances is the task of all of us in the society, once we understand what the impacts are. Despair was not a word she used. I think perhaps because she works on the concern using her entire being, she continues to see openings in people, and changes happen, so she continues to get new energy. Or perhaps she didn't share her despair with us.

My despair is also related to how so many forces in our society make it very difficult for people to live constructively. I don't need to enumerate them, since you already know them. For me, the combination of these social and environmental plagues causes me to weep when I let myself really think about it, because I just don't know how we're going to manage to address this terribly unbalanced system. Maybe we can't, and we're extinguishing the genetic health of our own

species and others. Maybe the social ills are fundamentally connected to how many of us are on this planet. I truly struggle with despair.

I want to share with you now one of the few very clear messages I have received from God. I was sitting in Meeting, with a familiar plaint going in my head about "Oh God it is so hard to balance all these things, the inner needs, the outer demands, work, keeping the house clean, overcoming my fear of strangers, making time for these dear children I have connections with before they grow up, working to help save the planet from environmental destruction, racism and militarism gone insane," when I heard in my head in a slightly exasperated tone, very slowly: "*Child you don't need to talk to **me** about balancing.*" My body and mind went completely still, I was awestruck. Secondly I understood, "I have to balance your pain against your need to grow." I sat for the rest of Meeting, coming to see the Spirit/God not as withdrawn from Creation, but constantly involved with the whole picture, and knowing the complexity of any change in ecosystems, so only making the slightest change here and just tipping the scales this way. Teresa of Avila said that when God speaks to you there are three things that are true: that the words are very clear, even if you don't understand what they mean; that you are immediately filled with stillness and awe; and that the words stay with you a long time, perhaps forever.

In the days of the Black Plague, when Julian of Norwich saw her society crumbling about her, she urged people to dwell with God whom she described out of her experience as homely, humble and welcoming to the weary of heart. We can and I believe must look on our naked despair, but not only that. In facing the despair, we can truly see and feel the cloth of love woven by Divine and earthy hands. This cloth of love, this cloak is formed of garden and song, of birth and nurturing young life, of creativity, of friendship and passion and forgiveness. It is formed by the joy of using the mind to solve problems, by right action which eases the heart and in the restfulness of waiting for the divine presence in Meeting. It is formed by the lessons which the death of loved ones teach us about living and love.

Blessed is the thrush's call,	piercing through the deepest night
Blessed is the morning star,	piercing through the early light
Blessed is the dawning sun,	rising up from earth to sky
Blessed is the dawn of hope,	rising up in you and I.

New words by Paul Klinkman  
Melody: traditional Appalachian 4-part round

I do not want to half-live my life. I'd rather not make the same old mistakes again, I'm interested in making new mistakes. I want to be here fully, to love fully, to learn and create and share what I can. For me the building of constructive habits is a significant tool to achieve those things but is not sufficient to ensure full living. I need to try to discern what my needs are and to address them, rather than suppressing them or hoping that the Spirit will just take care of it for me. I also need to recognize when I am retreating into habit, and use other practices to open myself up again to the joy of the present. I find that when I name and face my despair, I become more aware of my need for sustenance by God. Re-experiencing my need draws me closer to that sense that blessing lies all around me if I can only see it. I am so grateful to have Milwaukee

Meeting, Nightingales, and this particular Yearly Meeting as places where I have longterm spiritual connections.

I close with my versions of the Lord's Prayer and the song "Spirit of the Living God".

O Thou, Blessed Spirit, found in so many forms and places,  
Your Essence is One.  
May we learn to find you everywhere and be satisfied at last.

Forgive us our turning from your presence  
As we forgive those who deny that you are  
in us and in the rest of your Creation.  
Be present to us when we falter and lose our sense of you.  
Do not disappear when we are faced with evil.  
For the true Life comes in you  
Bringing with it wisdom and courage  
And Life springs forth from you again and always  
to water the Seed of Love.

Spirit of the living God, flow afresh in me (2x)  
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me  
Spirit of the living God, flow afresh in me.

Spirit of the living God, flow afresh in me (2x)  
Teach me, show me, help me find thee  
Spirit of the living God, flow afresh in me.