

# CRYING out Loud



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an anthology of poetry and prose  
on women's spiritual insight  
and experience

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In literature, women have until recent years been portrayed largely through men's eyes and the experiences and feelings of women have had limited exposure, though there are notable exceptions. Women have also frequently been portrayed as emotional, and emotion condemned as irrational. We present this anthology as a response to this situation and attitude, believing that the recollection and expression of feelings has an important place in life and literature, and worship. In this collection of pieces we are attempting to provide a glimpse into women's experience – richly varied – and the reflection on that experience. The word 'spiritual', though much used, is difficult to define. For us it has to do with touching depths of self-understanding, significant relationships, values and meanings.

The writings that we have selected fell easily into certain broad areas, to which we have tried to give shape and flow. Many of the pieces will be used by individuals privately, but we hope that several will be helpful in public worship.

The contributors are nearly all women, as might be expected. They are young and old and in-between. Some have died recently, whilst others are from a past age. Most are Unitarians, some have Unitarian connections and one or two had simply written in a way that chimed in with the rest. A few of the pieces have been published previously, but most are original and several of the writers appear in print for the first time. Four contributions by men have been included, because they showed insight into women's experience and feelings, whilst expressing their own predicament; we see differences here and also possibilities for meeting.

We are grateful to all who sent in contributions, whether their own or others', whether appearing here or not and we thank also those who granted permission to reproduce pieces. We acknowledge in particular the *Lancaster Guardian* for permission to reprint **Key Questions** by Verona Conway; the Lindsey Press for the passage from *The Great Unity* by Margaret Barr; Astra for her poem **On Anger**; Margaret Hill for her prayer; Futura Press, McDonald & Co. for the extract from *An Invisible Friendship* by J. Grenfell and K. Moore; the Unitarian Universalist Association for the extract from *Worshipping Together With Questioning Minds* by Sophia Lyon Fahs; Quaker Home Service for the extract from pages 40-1 of Damaris Parker – Rhodes's Swarthmore Lecture 1977, *Truth: A Path not a Possession*. We have been unable to locate Mairead to ask permission to reproduce her statement, **Dedication of a Peace Person**; we have also been unable to trace Pluto Press, for permission to quote from Bell Hooks's *Ain't I a Woman*. We trust that we have not overlooked any other request for copyright permission.

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Dawn Buckle and Celia Midgley,  
for the Unitarian Worship Subcommittee.

### **Newborn mother**

I hear her crying still  
In my memories.  
Endless nights of broken sleep.  
She cries for food and comfort  
But spurns my nervous breast.  
Inexperienced, trembling hands  
Mix thin, imperfect, powdery milk.  
Now preparation skills accomplished  
She sleeps; yet still  
I wake and hear her every sound.

Those long days of uncertainty  
Before routine began.  
When will she wake?  
Now, before the housework is complete?  
She wakes! She cries!  
I leave my toils to calm her wails.  
I hear her crying still.

An hour of coaxing, she is fed.  
She gazes, wide-eyed in wonder  
At a room full of the unknown,  
Our everyday taken-for-granted room.  
Please little baby, now go to sleep!

I rock her, sing her, lull her to sleep,  
But, when she is quiet  
And my patience near gone.  
I hear her crying still.

Gently I tuck soft blankets  
Round this tiny spark of life.  
I walk to nowhere, hoping  
Frosty sunshine, fresh breezes  
Will disperse my tensions,  
My chains to that everyday room  
That is my prison.  
Friends far away, neighbours unknown,  
I, lonely, trapped, exhausted,  
Cry.  
And I feel my crying still.

Weeks, like years later  
A look of recognition, a smile!  
Amazement fills her face  
As she utters her first 'Agoo'  
Her gurgles fill my heart with joy!  
And hope! – But,  
I hear her crying still.

*Kathy Timiney*

### **To a sleeping child**

Petalled upon the pillow are your hands  
In water-lily white of innocence  
Uncurled towards the light  
And unafraid of night –  
Hands above your sleeping head unclasped  
Through holding life in trust;  
Nothing from the hard world have you grasped  
To find it only dust;  
Breath scarcely strong enough to mist a glass,  
And lips untouched,  
Oblivious of the waiting world whose lust  
Must one day offer them its bitter fruit.

But now how wise these petal-shuttered eyes  
That see no dark in looking on the skies!  
A bright unclouded dream assails your sleep  
To keep your faith in life, in me, unharmed  
For the serpent that must crawl to you is coiled  
Outside your nursery bars;  
All evil is disarmed while you are curled  
Within the guardian beams of watchful stars.  
Yet one day you must face the dark and meet  
The white-fleeced Wolf that ravages the world.

*Phoebe Hesketh*

### **Life that in me has rest**

The world spreads out unfenced beyond my garden lawn:  
Dream journeys climb at length to end in kitchen walls:  
Life to which I was born  
Starts where I am with endless unrelenting calls.

Heavy the yoke to which I find me always strapped  
If I should strive to soar or struggle to be free.  
Life in which I am trapped  
Recalls me to submission unconcerned for me.

'Life is a privilege': but this seems meaningless.  
'Life is a gift': but I am not accepting and devout.  
Life 'meant to be' like this  
Is privilege and gift that I could do without.

What then? if I have been misshapen from the start?  
How then, rightly to use each crossgrained day?  
Life of which I am part  
Shall heal me if I give it unresisted way.

*June Bell*

### Whirlwind in October

Frustration is,  
To be twisted  
Spun on tiptoe  
By whirlwind in the grit and dust,  
Wild bitter gust,  
Sweeping the crisping leaves, dead brown and rust,  
Waste papers careless thrust  
Creased and greased,  
Cast down, and now flung up –

– To be spun dry  
Bound in the unseen coils,  
Trapped in its toils,  
Wrapped  
In the swirling gritty waste,  
Wound round,  
Twisted and wrung  
Faster and tighter spun ...  
Till the times of endurance done,  
The wind drops.

And the limp crumpled garment of my being,  
No longer seeing,  
Slumps on the ground,  
Crumpled flat and dry.

Life has a bitter taste.

### June Bell

A rock  
on the tideline  
bruised endlessly  
by heedless  
crying waves,  
resting resigned,  
broken so gradually  
no-one notices.

Tide-lashed rocks  
are women  
bruised endlessly  
by heedless  
crying needs.

Breaking  
so gradually  
no-one  
notices.

How many waves  
can I stand?  
'You do too much.'  
'You don't do enough.'  
'Get off, don't crowd me.'  
'See, you don't like me.'  
The phone doesn't ring,  
or rings too often  
with the wrong message.

'Mummy, I want.'  
'Dear, could you just.'  
'If you loved me you would.'  
'I'm sorry, I can't tonight.'  
Waves, waves, heedless waves.  
If the rocks cried out  
to the raging sea,  
'Stop! Stop!  
I hurt.

I need.  
I want.'  
Would it listen?

Sue Jenkins

Woman, who is mindful  
of the full mind  
burdened under stresses  
of fragmented days  
and nights of strained  
weariness? Who sees  
behind mother-eyes,  
wife-voice, floral  
printed smocking of  
the swelling body, to  
moonspirit chained  
on rocks of relentless  
duty? Mind dulls  
as hands roughen,  
hope cracks like  
split fingernails  
and dreams tatter  
like laddered tights  
whipped by March winds.  
Woman, who cares?

Sister-hands reach  
you tenderness;  
Moon-Mother reflects  
in milk-grey dishwater  
true as in enchanted  
pools between dim mountains.  
Earth-Mother urges fullness;  
mind; heart; body;  
even to death at last  
through danger She  
urges you follow.  
Meanwhile live  
selfwhole, undefined  
by childview, manview,  
cold empty habit.  
Caring, issue mind full  
out into the wind.

*Sue Jenkins*

## **Excuses**

This is not the offering I had planned to give you. I had intended to produce an analysis of the pressures exerted both from society and from conventional psychology on the mental health of women. But the books on my shelves offering a critique of psychology and society from a feminist point of view are still unread, and that study still remains to be done. Instead I can only share with you my experience of some of the pressures which have stopped me from taking the time and making the effort to get on with it.

Life just makes too many demands. I am torn apart trying to be a good mother to my children, a friend to all who want my friendship, teacher to my pupils, worker both in and out of the home, carer and comforter to all who need my ministrations.

What happens to me? I lose myself in this constant round of trying to meet other people's needs. To become whole again I must make time and space for myself. Sometimes this means a few hours – or days – away from everyone who demands so much, to regain my energy before I can use it for my own purposes; sometimes it means space, a place to make my own, to be alone with myself. Sometimes it means taking a fresh look at the pressures I let other people exert on me. Why do I go round carrying the load of a hundred and one jobs needing doing, cares other people have shifted on to me? Perhaps the only healthy reaction is one of anger and refusal.

Yet how hard it is to say no. I don't want to be uncaring, unloving, or unfriendly. Why don't I love myself enough to take more account of my own needs without feeling guilty? How difficult it is to ask for things for myself. Do I even know what I want? Some times it can be too painful to allow myself to have needs and desires. Once I articulate, even to myself, what I want, I become all the more aware of the gap between what I do with my life and what I would like to do.

*Ann Arthur*

### The seven ages of woman

All the world's a stage,  
And all the many women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
Each woman in her time plays many parts,  
Her acts being seven ages.

At first the infant,  
Mewling and puking in her parents' arms,  
And then the lovely schoolgirl, with her uniform,  
And daily homework, racing like a hare  
To diverse courses at her school.

Then the wage-earner,  
Skilled to do a job, independent of all men  
With her full purse.

Next the bride,  
Cleaning house, shopping and making meals,  
Rearing children, watching all their needs,  
Striving to maintain her personality  
Amid the constant chores.

And then the matron,  
With public calls both for her services and her wisdom,  
Who by choice or fee, sustains the fabric  
Of the social life in home and business,  
Town and state. And there she plays full part.

The next stage  
Shifts into the keen and comely pensioner  
With twenty years ahead, experienced and alert;  
Her youthful clothes well styled; the world to show  
How active she still is; while new-discovered powers  
Undreamt in the close confines of home persuade her  
To further ventures.

Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is proud old age, slipping by pain or peace, to sleep,  
With love, with loss, with crowded life complete.

*Joan McLachlan (after W.S.)  
(d.1978)*

Why did she have to die? You only have one mother and father. I feel cross and angry and upset inside of me. My mother did not want to die at that time. They said she *could* live for two years but it was only two months. They would not let me tell her *all* the truth – they thought she would not accept it – although she asked me to. That was the hardest part really. We did not get a chance to say goodbye. For three weeks she lay in her bed in our house, with Dad beside her, thinking she would improve. Or did she know? An intelligent mother of three children, and seven grandchildren. Thank goodness she was at home with all of us. There was a lot of pain for her and hurt for us; but her sense of humour never left. Even being fed was made humorous by me being the mother and she the child.

During those three weeks she lay watching others tend gardens as she always did, still able to offer advice about taking cuttings.

The day after she died was my birthday. So hard for Dad to give me the present so lovingly wrapped weeks before. So hard to read her name through wet eyes.

Now there's only Dad. He knows he is my favourite; he feels the loss tremendously but his home is here now with us and long may it remain that way. Grandfathers are good people to have around. They keep a gentle, unobtrusive eye on sick grandchildren; they even understand the comings and goings of teenagers! A gentle nod of the head that does not quite keep up with modern activities but is prepared to accept all things of all people.

We know he is there in his own room, looking out onto the garden containing many of Mum's flowers; but never, never, interfering. Long may he be here. Perhaps Mum's death has resulted in an already loving father being nearer to us – but I wish she could be here too.

*Carole Smith*  
(written some months after her mother's death in 1983)

### **Mother and son**

My son! My son!  
What is it? Whatever's the matter?  
Wake up! Are you asleep?  
No, I'm here. What do you want?  
I feel poorly, I've never felt so ill.  
Mother, you say that every night!  
I've never felt like I do tonight.  
But you said that last night!  
I'm not making it up. Should I send for the doctor?  
Try to ignore it (whatever it is). Just lie quietly.  
My heart is beating.  
Thank God for that.  
I hope nothing happens to me.  
Do you mean you don't want to die? Who does?  
I have nightmares I can't escape.  
I nod right off and escape from reality.  
I feel awful awake or asleep.

I lived on my own once. Just me.  
I can't stay on my own.  
I hadn't a care in the world. I invited my friends in.  
Nobody comes to see me. Nobody cares.  
They were free to come and go. I was glad to see them.  
Glad too of my own company.  
Day after day I never go out. No-one comes in.  
I'm afraid to invite my friends in now in case they disturb you.  
I've got to have my sleep.  
Sleep now. Rest. Have courage. Be comforted.  
There's nobody here but you and I.

*Peter Sampson*

Minister calls  
Guilt meets guilt  
Face on at the door  
And almost before it's closed  
The kettle's on  
To protect us both  
There's safety behind teacups  
Not in numbers.

I'm the minister  
First to confess and be forgiven –  
I had not called of late –  
Then she – unchurched these months –  
Hands clasp in mutual absolution  
Defences now down  
Talk quietly together.

*Keith Gilley*



### A learning found

Spring suddenly breaking through after the wet snow,  
From running slush straight to a week of sun,  
Mild and sweet, morning and evening ringed with clamorous song  
That plucks my heart and throat  
Crying out glory! glory!  
And stills my feet –

Such spring brings  
A sudden rushing rise of live green things;  
So that, my muscles tensed with the fresh unrest  
That surges still when the stretching day is done,  
If I close my eyes  
There on the dark lids stayed  
Bold like an unfurled crest  
Stands a new grass blade.

Instantly clear,  
Perfect green and near,  
Glimpsed and then gone,  
But instant too  
Swift hurled  
Some fiercer blade  
Cleaves heart and throat unstayed  
Comes sharp to rest,  
Lodged in my very ground  
Quivering as my lips are quivering  
At a learning found:

Simply,  
I want to be  
That which helps life to spring up new in you,  
That which brings joy to leap  
In your sad deeps.  
That love has need to be beloved I know,  
And that for me this cannot now be so;  
Only my sudden learning starkly showed  
My longing and concern are stilling deep,  
To help you grow;  
Loving can have untaking need to give  
Simply itself to help another live.

(Might this be God?)

*June Bell*

### Nurturing a spouse

My decision to share my experience of taking care of my husband, Roy, during his recent mental illness was not an easy one, but now I am glad that I have done it. In thinking through some of the difficulties and trauma of the two years from my husband's descent into depression on the day we moved house, to his present state of 'near normality', I remember the overwhelmingly strong feelings at the beginning of his illness that looking after him was of paramount importance and the conflict that caused with my duty to my work. How, later, I came to appreciate the necessity of having my work to do to maintain my own normality. It is very difficult when a partner is suffering mentally to be detached; one almost becomes affected by symbiosis. I became determined that – the inner me – the life spirit – the essence of life within was not going to be damaged. As well as my work, Roy's stay in hospital helped me maintain my individuality. I had to cope without him. And I found that I could!

In the early days I had difficulty in accepting that for most of the time all Roy required was that I hold his hand or stroke his head. He had no wish to discuss his mental state or how to get out of it, as I desired to do. I felt that he was rejecting me, shutting me out. There were also guilt feelings about the way my life had progressed in relation to his and what I should have done about it.

He received treatment from the psychiatrist at our local hospital, as an in-patient in a psychiatric hospital and eventually day care (again at the local hospital). He had medical treatment – drug therapy and electric shock treatment which affected both of us – and social treatment, both group and occupational therapy. Was it all this or was it, as I suspect, the physiotherapists who cured Roy's frozen shoulder, that helped him most? This question shows what little faith I have in psychiatric treatment! I became convinced that no matter what is done or given to a patient with a mental disorder that patient will only get better when he/she is ready.

I shall be forever grateful to our friends, minister and members of our congregation for their sympathy and support and for treating Roy so normally even when his behaviour was far from normal. Probably my greatest helper was a work colleague whose husband had had a similar illness sometime before. I was able to talk to her and know that she understood. She horrified me by telling me that it took her husband two years to recover. At the time I couldn't believe it – but it turned out that she was right!

*Dawn Buckle*

# BLOSSOMING

I am alone – but am I alone?  
I wish to speak – but there is no-one to speak to.  
But is this so?  
I am here.  
Yet – Who am I?  
I have forgotten.  
For so long the person who is here now has been subdued  
– almost into nothingness.  
I have given birth many times –  
In doing so I feel bereft.  
I feel to have lost something of the person I am.  
Surely this should not be.  
But it is.  
Why?  
Because I have allowed this to happen.  
They are not here now –  
They have gone.  
I alone remain.  
It is time to rediscover who I really am.  
Where shall I begin?  
I shall begin here and now –  
And speak to myself.  
What shall I say to myself?  
I will say  
'Who are you?'  
And I shall reply  
'I am a Person'  
And will build on that.

*Ann Latham*

#### Lament of a new resident in an old people's home

I hate that you should call me 'dear',  
And say 'And how are we today?'  
In that insincere and patronising voice.  
I am a person, not a pet,  
I understand, there is no need to stroke me.  
I hate the way you used my Christian name,  
Before you even asked or knew me.  
I do not want to be another Lucy, Jane or Emma,  
A nonentity in a crowd of first named women.  
I am Mrs. Brown, and proud to bear his name.  
Perhaps when I have chosen my few friends,  
We can embark upon a closer understanding.  
Beneath these shabby genteel clothes  
I am an entity,  
That has been built up year by year,  
By joys and sorrows, work and play,  
Responsibility, experience, love.  
I am the little girl who wandered in the primrose wood.  
I am the girl whose French was weak but always passed exams,  
Who loved Geography, and wallowed in a wealth of words.  
I am the student whose college days were rich,  
With friends, philosophy, ideals, new thoughts.  
I am the woman who was wife and mother.  
Who knew the splendour of a family bound with love.  
But also knew the heartbreak, and the passing  
From baby wants to teenage needs and pressures,  
Of loss, and irreplaceable companion.  
I am the traveller, who slept on mountain tops.  
Who braved the Arctic seas of the North Cape.  
I am the wife who loved to cook and clean,  
Whose house was filled with friends who came  
To talk, to walk, to put the world aright.  
I am a person, I am 'me', I am not 'dear'.

*Margaret Ridley*

### Words and feelings

I feel my words,  
Sometimes after they're spoken;  
And that's a pity.  
'The pity of it all.'  
For words don't have to be daggers,  
And when mine are they stab me.

Words have feelings –  
The feelings I give them when I speak.  
Words have feelings,  
And the feelings I give them when I speak  
I frequently find  
Are a shade too this or a shade too that.  
Words have their own feelings,  
And start to rebel when I get them wrong.  
They slip into other people's mouths,  
And mis-interpret me.  
All because I couldn't feel the feelings of words.

*Sophie Herzberg*

Let's keep on talking, love – I know  
that words don't say it all  
but we have shared  
so much in conversation that  
has been for us such sweet  
release  
and opened up  
to full fresh air our dust-bound lives  
that I would rather have  
a less pure breath  
than one that's choked in living death.

*Celia Midgley*

'I tell you I must go!' I retorted, roused to something like passion. 'Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? – a machine without feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you – and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh; it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal – as we are!'

*Charlotte Bronte (1816-55) from Jane Eyre*

### Flower

Oh it's nothing, they say  
and lightly toss away  
the thanks, or crush  
the opening flower of love  
that's offered them.  
I have known them –  
and so I'm glad  
that it is something to you  
that you take my fragile gift  
and comprehend its worth  
and smell its fragrance.

*Celia Midgley*

We have passed beyond the point of no return  
We have gazed into each other's eyes  
Maskless and without fear  
The maskless moment said  
I know you, I love you  
So do not mourn the passing of the days of joy  
As we take our journey, like minds are always there  
At the end of the journey to greet us arriving  
And the fond spirits of those who love us well  
Can never leave us, but stay in our hearts forever.

*Judith Crompton*

Rosie is thirty,  
She got married last year.  
Her eyes are warm and brown  
And she always looks at you  
When you talk with her.  
Her face is clear and bright,  
She radiates warmth and love.  
She is the most fully alive person I know.  
Amongst a group of people  
She moves easily and quietly,  
Lightening others' cares with laughter.  
Her voice is gentle  
But filled with the joy of living.  
Just being with her, when I was ill,  
I learned again the miracle  
That life is good and true and beautiful.  
Eight weeks ago  
Rosie learned that she has cancer.  
I rage and rage for Rosie:  
I cannot fit the jagged fragments,  
The dark ugliness of pain and fear,  
Into that shining vision of wholeness  
Which Rosie helped me to see.

But then Rosie gently shows me  
We must allow the darkness and the pain  
To be a part of the whole.  
For integration of experience is possible  
Only if there are real fragments  
Which need uniting.  
The miracle of that vision of wholeness  
Includes Rosie's cancer  
And my raging.  
Thank you Rosie.

*Elizabeth Rogers*

So much exchanged  
now crises receding  
much unsaid  
but lingering.  
Parting this moment  
choking shared pain  
I yours you mine  
eye to eye know  
woman's hurt  
fragile future.

*Celia Midgley*

What is this strength some women have  
To flow with honest tears and laughter  
Where mine is a courage born  
And that but rarely  
Not out of strength but desperation.

*Keith Gilley*

### **Reality**

Here we are  
breaking through to reality.  
Hang on.  
Do not fear  
lest the web that falls away  
leaves only shattered pieces.

Let us step,  
you and I and you,  
through the sheer  
translucent curtain,  
and there spin out a mystery  
that binds and makes us whole.

*Celia Midgley*

### On going to Hucklow Chapel

We filed in candle-lit procession along the field-path to the chapel for the final epilogue of the week. I was at that time very close to blindness. The candles glowed, flickered, blew out in the wind, and were re-lighted from one another. The winding line of little lights shone down the path. The effect was beautiful and, to me, quite frightening, for I was stumbling along afraid at every moment of falling. Suddenly a voice said quietly, 'Hold on to me' and an arm took mine. I walked in safety and the little lights shone for me.

*Kath Mayor*

### A Quaker acre in Sale

'Society of Friends' it said on the gate  
a little park of red and green –  
I entered early to get some peace.  
It seemed to be a burial ground  
a garden of remembrance  
and I so wanted to forget –  
But still, it was a pretty place, and quiet.

As I sat

A group of chattering children came to play  
around the graves, out on the grass  
only infants, four or five –  
Their lively 'kindergarten' shook my morbid mood.  
Inquisitive – 'What's that there in your hand?'  
pointing to the shell on my key-ring, a past-love token.  
The solitude was broken.  
I smiled, forgiving them this interruption.  
The gravestones they hopped across enclosed an isolation  
But maybe we – though fleetingly – had found  
The society of friends.

*Helen Eadie*

# the NATURAL world

White wheat, awaiting the blade;  
We harvest our lives  
daily, by the heart.

*Cynthia J. Edson*

Moon, full, above the low hills  
Brings rising currents  
quartering earth's days.

*Cynthia J. Edson*

If there are no hills  
Washed by celestial light  
From a widening sky –  
No hills to see –  
Then look down, my friend.  
Let your eyes find  
The inexplicable winter rose  
Struggling over the wall.  
Cease yearning for the hills  
If there are no hills.

One evening,  
In your flat concrete city,  
You will walk with a small child  
Who will point to the sky  
And show you,  
Trapped in a patch  
Of dark December blue,  
A new moon.

And maybe then  
You will know  
That your hills are here.

*Elizabeth Rogers*

#### **Invitation to a child**

Come with me early, one bright morning,  
In late summer, to the high field  
Above the cliff, where the blue sea  
Caresses the sharp dark rocks,  
And far above invisible, the lark  
Cascades his piercing sweet notes,  
Into the thyme laden air ...  
Tread softly, tread carefully  
Over the grass blades,  
For here in the dew are the fairy rings,  
The snow white tiny cloud circles  
Of new born mushrooms, sprung in the night  
From the hidden sweet dark earth,  
Scented with the mysteries of growing flowers and grass.  
Do not touch these precious miracles,  
Pink fanned beneath their parasols,  
For here is magic unexplained,  
Moment of wonder when we and creation are one.

*Margaret Ridley*

#### **Orchid**

Gathering buttercups  
daisies and harebells I  
found the most exquisite  
delicate flower.  
Why did I pluck it so  
unhesitatingly?  
Now its sweet summer's life's  
sapped to an hour.

*Celia Midgley*

### The tiger

He is famous, this tiger,  
He leaps across our T.V. screens in striped splendour;  
His muscles ripple beneath the loose cat's skin,  
Eyes clear, pelt sleek and thick,  
He epitomises the unthinking power of the machine.  
He is magnificent!

The voice of India sings in his blood.  
Ancient race memories live behind his enigmatic stare.  
Dappled jungle, parched grassland,  
The careful stalking of the fat buck,  
The pleasure of the kill:  
He is the Rajah of the wild!

Cool tree-fringed pools when the sun is hot,  
Basking in deep shady places.  
He casually licks a huge paw  
And delicately washes his ears.  
He is feared and admired,  
He is omnipotent!

His deadly enemy of old, the elephant, he avoids.  
His newer enemy he cannot.  
He is caught in nets and crated up like a spare part.  
His strength he spends in futile anger against his bars.  
He is a prisoner!

And now, in splendid health, his freedom gone,  
He advertises freedom for us all.  
His awful strength and beauty squandered thirty seconds at a time,  
He contemptuously contemplates us through our magic box,  
Haughty and aloof,  
The unconquered tiger!

*Fay Parker*

### I wish I loved the human race or On not watching television

My friends who watch the box each night  
Before whose bored escapist sight  
(Mine would be, were I in their place)  
Pass faces of the human race,  
Respond to me with veiled surprise  
Apparent in their goggle eyes  
When each and all become aware  
My eyes are not (if I am) square.

Now they look out when they look in,  
And here the differences begin.  
With eyes and ears and feelings glued  
They view the global multitude.  
The noted figures of the day  
Confront them in diverse array –  
Bellowing, bluffing, Freudian-slipping,  
Threatening, jesting, ego-tripping,  
Projecting each with look and voice  
The public image of their choice.  
Be they thus skilful or inept  
My friends these images accept.  
Or fat or thin or short or tall  
They recognise them one and all  
While I with such acquaintance scant  
Feel overwhelmed, and ignorant.

My own assessment of their taste  
With some reserved concern is laced.  
It often seems that politics  
Is little more than knavish tricks;  
And politicians promise fair  
But really only seem to care  
About their own ascent to fame,  
And never taking any blame.  
I'd rather tend my garden gay  
Than watch some sex and violence play.  
I'd rather make tomatoes grow  
Than see some semi-naked show.

I'd rather hear the lark and wren  
Than any sick comedian.  
In short, if I am up and doing  
I'm happier than tele-viewing.

While world events around me roll  
I pause to look in on my soul  
And ponder from a different view  
The things that other people do.  
It helps me understand with grace  
The foibles of the human race.

*June Bell*



**CONTRASTS  
AND  
CONNECTIONS**

There is no hour that has not its births of gladness and despair, no morning brightness that does not bring new sickness to desolation, as well as new forces to genius and love. There are so many of us, and our lots are so different: what wonder that Nature's mood is often in harsh contrast with the great crises of our lives? We are children of a large family, and must learn, as such children do, not to expect that our hurts will be made much of – to be content with little nurture and caressing, and help each other the more.

*George Eliot (1819-80) from Adam Bede*

### Unheeded, unheeding

Two birds, black and white, with slow wing beats  
curl and weave. The courting dance  
of the lapwing tumbles and rises  
in the grey spring sky  
over the unheeding houses at the edge of the town.  
Unheeded, at our feet, the crocus strikes  
a purple spearhead. Unheeded the daffodil  
breaches the dull earth.  
Unheeded the crisp bag covers the bud and the litter  
clutches at the roots of the hedge.  
*Unheeding, unheeding we pass by the woman  
with head thrown back, mouth a thin line,  
tears unshed in her eyes.*  
Unheeded, unheeded the child with big eyes  
watches and watches  
Unheeded, unheeded the shuffling stutter  
Of ageing feet.  
Unheeded, unheeded the youth with spiky hair  
strokes the girl's cheek.  
*We pass by  
Our eyes turned inward we ignore the small  
frail things of spring.  
Unheeding we pass by the small pains  
and desires of human life.*

What will awaken us, open our eyes?

*We do not lack kindness, compassion or  
a sense of beauty.  
But our needs crowd in on us  
The noise of our minds drowns the sharp  
cry of the bird and the child's wordless call.*

Open us, release us.  
Let the yeast of the spirit work within us,  
forcing us to turn the eye outward,  
to look, to see on this grey spring evening,  
the glory and the pain.

*Eila Forrester*

## Help

So many people, so many living creatures, even plants are crying out for help. Starving millions in hunger and misery, prisoners of conscience, victims of tyrants, trapped and hunted animals all cry out for help. Even the parched grass and the drooping tree seem to plead for help.

People young and old are yearning for love. Sorrowing when their love is rejected or unreciprocated, ostracised when their loving is despised by a society with rules of an age long past, when what was different was condemned – these are crying out for help. Women and men in relations of turmoil, those anxious to have or keep a job, others who care for the sick and dependent – these all cry out for help.

*In loneliness, bereavement, separation and rejection, the living everywhere are crying out for help. Is there help at the heart of the universe – or nothing?*

Many die in misery and agony, but helpers come. Imaginative, capable people, skilful and loving give relief and healing, water and grain, tools for making wells in deserts; they plough and irrigate stony wildernesses, towards a better life for survivors. Friends, too, are ready to lighten their neighbours' burdens and support and encourage the downcast.

As the cry for help reaches the pity in these hearts, so may we also work that thousands may be stirred, that love, mercy, pity, peace at the heart of things may meet the cry for help.

*Elsbeth Vallance*

## The common cough

They lie unseeing on their charpoys remembering that beautiful Bhopal cloud which gave not life but death.

And their coughing breaks through the silence of remembrance:  
'In the buildings men from the West make medicines'.  
But no one told them about the gas which makes them cough  
And each day another cough ceases.

Far away African families lie unseeing under the hot sun.  
Each day the all-comprehending silence grows  
and some will never cough again.  
The men from the North promised them many things  
But no one told them about the drought which makes them weak  
And each day another cough ceases.

In my safe surgery a baby coughs.  
We the people from the West and North  
promise the medicine and the magic needle.  
But someone told them about the fits  
and they refused the magic needle.  
And now the baby coughs and I hope  
That cough will never grow silent.

And I see the world united by  
half education,  
misguided trust  
and a cough.

*Jane Williams*

## Forgiveness

*O God, forgive us.*

Forgive us that we have so abused your Spirit with our narrow minds.

*O God, forgive us.*

Forgive us that we have made mental idols of you to suit our own self-interest.

*O God, forgive us.*

Forgive us that we have made you our Father only, and forgotten that you are our Mother too.

*O God, forgive us.*

Forgive us that in reverencing your Son, we have forgotten that it is his humanity, not his maleness, that is important.

*O God, forgive us.*

Forgive us that we neglect your Spirit's equal presence in men and women; that we forget we are all made one in Christ.

*O God, forgive us.*

Forgive us that we have used your fatherhood to devalue and oppress the women you created in your likeness, and thus denied and blasphemed against your motherhood.

*O God, forgive us.*

Forgive us that we have identified you with our own race and nation, and used your name in the crimes of slavery, war, exploitation and unjust rule perpetrated against our sisters and brothers around the world.

*O God, forgive us.*

Enable us to broaden our vision, to see your face in humanity's daughters as well as in its sons.

*Father, forgive us.*

Enable us to discern your Spirit in the sons and daughters of every race and nation of humankind.

*Mother, forgive us.*

*Cliff Reed*

## Key questions – and answers worth respect

In recent years, the subject of nuclear weapons must have come into the mind of almost everyone in this country.

But a great deal of what has been said on the subject has been based on the premise that nations can be considered as enemies and that fighting to kill can be justified.

This premise may be true, but every individual needs to think about it long and deeply before he or she accepts it as the truth.

A fair number of people, both Christians and non-Christians, are pacifists – that is, they are willing to die for a cause, but not willing to kill others.

Such people are a small minority of the population, but they pose a question which should be seriously asked and considered by the majority – namely, are pacifists insane?

In considering this question, it is worth remembering that biologists tell us that man is the only animal species that kills its own kind. Tigers may kill their natural prey for food, but they never kill other tigers.

There may be competition for territory or for mating partners, but the contests are ritualised and do not end in bloodshed. Natural selection has eliminated those species of animal whose members fight each other to the death.

Is it not likely then that the human race will disappear, unless it finally renounces warfare?

This argument is based on scientific knowledge, but may not have the power to prevail against the deep fear that has been fostered in people's minds and leads them to talk about being 'left naked' if we have no destructive weapons.

It is the moral and religious question which is crucial – the question we must all face as to how to obey the command of Jesus to love our enemies?

And if every human being is a child of God, can it be right to kill anyone, or even to threaten to kill them, which is what 'deterrence' really means?

We all have the freedom to find our own answers to such questions. Every honest answer will need courage to live with, because humanity as a whole is faced with deep danger.

If we have reached our own answers with honesty and courage, then our position deserves respect from those who have reached different answers.

*Verona Conway (D.1987)  
from The Lancaster Guardian 29 July 1953*

### Dedication of a peace person

I have a simple message for the world from this Movement for Peace.

I want to live and love and build a just and peaceful society.

I want for children, as I want for myself, life at home, at work and at play to be a life of joy and peace.

I recognise that to build such a life demands of me, dedication, hard work and courage.

I recognise that there are many problems in my society which are a source of conflict and violence.

I recognise that every bullet fired and every exploding bomb makes that work more difficult.

I reject the use of the bomb and the bullet and all the techniques of violence.

I dedicate myself to working with my neighbours, near and far, day in and day out, to building that peaceful society in which the tragedies we have known are a bad memory and a continuing warning.

*Mairead*

### Step by stumbling step

Peace is not simply an absence of armed conflict.

Peace is not simply an absence of conflict.

Peace is not simply an absence of arms.

Peace is not simply an absence.

Peace is not simply.

Peace is not.

Peace is.

Peace.

*Elizabeth Rogers*

Anna Swanwick was born in Liverpool, June 1813. She was the youngest daughter of John Swanwick, a descendant of one of the two thousand clergy who were ejected from their churches in 1662 owing to the Act of Uniformity. She was an enthusiast for education, working in conjunction with other pioneers to found women's colleges, and for the removal of the disabilities that stood in the way of women's professional advancement.

Amongst her teachings, Anna wrote *Enfranchisement of Women* ... 'On the battlefield of life, where the powers of evil and of good are arrayed for mortal combat, the forces which are needed are not physical but spiritual forces; not powerful limbs, but hearts and brains; and in these, women are not deficient. Give them a sound, practical education, remove their social and political disabilities and in their energy and sympathy, conscientiousness and tenderness, we shall, I believe, have a reservoir of power which will lift this great nation to a higher level of social and political life.'

*Anna Swanwick (1813-1899)*  
*from Uniterian Teachers — their lead in thought and work,*  
*The Lindsey Press, 1923.*

It had often been said that the four walls of a house were not big enough to satisfy the whole personality of anyone. Women in the past had often been condemned to live under such conditions, and thus their outlook upon life was dangerously restricted and narrowed. Today things were very different. There was much more scope and many more opportunities of service for women in every sphere of life. Everyone rejoiced in this emancipation, but they should not forget that there was still need for home-makers – the people who stayed at home to look after the needs of those who did their work in other spheres. It was impossible to do without the home-makers, for a nation's greatness depended to a very great extent upon the character, the stability, the efficiency of those who stayed at home. But those people who stayed at home must not be content to be merely house-keepers – that was a fairly easy task – they must be something more important. They must be home-makers, and this task required great efficiency, skill and personality. To be real home-makers necessitated that they should break through the mundane world of everyday 'things' and link themselves with that unseen world which was ever around for those who had ears to hear and eyes to see.

No fact about men and women was better attested than the possession of spiritual insight. The men and women who were highly endowed with this power had a keener sense of the real and a truer conception of the eternal things – things that really mattered.

And so we had to ask ourselves the question, 'Do we use this faculty of insight?' It was very easy amid the trials and petty worries of life to allow ourselves to be hemmed in by all that was trivial and mundane – to mistake the four brick walls for the dwelling, and forget about the faith and joy and love which really made the home. Men and women had the ability to link themselves with the Divine. We, each of us, possessed the faculty of imagination, of admiration and adoration. There was a world ever around us which added very greatly to the beauty and minds of our lives. Life would be unendurable without this element, yet many of us were unconscious of this great possession. The fact remained, however, that it was present, and was the possession of all.

*Ethel Kay (1893-1964)*  
*Minister of Warwick Unitarian Church (1929-1936)*  
*reported in The Leamington Gazette, November 1929.*

The industry of the country is practically at a standstill. Never has there been such a perilous crisis, and the danger is all the more because the trouble is deep. It is worse than is generally recognised, and never in this world will this great and terrible industrial problem be solved by one Prime Minister, be he ever so wonderful, or one Parliament or by any group of men however brilliant they may be. It rests on the community as a whole and unless there is a change now, once and for always, there will be no limit to the degradation of humanity.

We must learn to simplify our lives and care less for material things and make clear to ourselves our aims and ideals. Every man and woman of the nation has got to go to war. War that is to be waged against ignorance and sloth. Love of peace is to be the battle cry, and the war must be waged until the winds of the scientific spirit blow through each soul.

The very first thing to be realised is that Man is not on the earth to make himself as comfortable as he possibly can, and that the natural resources of the world are not for that end. Man is on earth to bring God among men – nothing less: and God is only in men when they are fully reasonable and have in their eyes the light of understanding and in their hearts a love which embraces the universe. And to this end we must have education and yet more education for the humblest child born. This education need not be elaborate; its end should be to bring the child into close touch with the wisdom of the ages, and bring him back to nature and its bigness. Mr. H.G. Wells has said 'a sense of history as the common adventure of all mankind is as necessary for peace within as it is for peace between nations'. Food and clothing and material benefits must be more evenly distributed throughout the community. No longer is it possible to maintain an industrial community in peace where there is a surplus of money (not wealth) at one end and at the other conditions of poverty. The time has come when Mankind must limit itself in the name of freedom. For the humblest industrial worker is mutely aware of the latent power within him, and whether he knows it or not it is for its freedom that he is struggling.

And may it be added in conclusion that these reflections are not thoughtless opinions, but wisdom gathered from the more thoughtful writers of recent times.

*F.J. May 1926*  
'F.J.', who wrote the above article when she was a young girl, became Florence Carter. She died in 1986.

There is no reason, why we should not enjoy all the good things; let us continue to worship God in nature, taking a Sunday from church occasionally, to do so, if we wish. Let us use wireless and go on improving it. Let us, by all means, continue to read good literature – but let us also continue to seek God in public worship that our souls might be cultivated as well as our bodies and our minds, lest the higher faculties become neglected and fall into feebleness and uselessness.

There are a few pioneer souls who believe that we are on the verge of a religious revival; not necessarily in the old form, for the Church of the future may take upon itself new forms. Therefore there is room for experiment in public worship. Those of us who believe in progress, believe that we live in a grander world than our forefathers in the realm of material things – and, today, we are also conscious of a grander spiritual universe than they ever dreamed of. Therefore we must not restrict this new knowledge by seeking to express it through the medium of forms which no longer fit the new faith. We must take care that our faith should not become void because of old forms of worship. I believe that the Church should use all the findings of science, literature, and art in the service of a more adequate worship. Worship should be a full, free, and an abundant life of praise and prayer. The true Church will recognise its obligation in the world – in fellowship and service, and thus shall we realise that a community of believers is essential in seeking to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

*Ethel Kay*  
*from The Leamington Gazette June 1930*

### On a child's religious education

I am convinced that the major reason why the world is cursed with so many narrow-minded and prejudiced people in the matter of religion is sectarian education in childhood. Others again would omit all that is specifically religious, and teach just ethics, the science of conduct and good life. With these too I have sympathy, *if the alternative is Sectarian Teaching*. But I believe and know that there is another alternative, namely the teaching of Comparative Religion, and it is that alternative that was the basis of our experiment at the Gokhale School. And here let me hasten to add that by Comparative Religion I do not mean (as is all too often meant) to take one's own religion as a standard with which to measure and compare all the rest, treating them, at best, with a sort of tolerant patronage, and at worst measuring what is best in one's own with what is inferior in others, and so, of course, strengthening prejudices already strong. By Comparative Religion I mean genuine interest in and unbiased study of all the world's great religious traditions. And this can and should be started at a tender age, by saturating the child's mind with story material, not from one, but from all; till Christians are as familiar with the story of Buddha carrying the little lamb in his arms as they are with Jesus blessing the children; till Muslims know as much about Arjuna's conversations with God as they do about Mohammed's; and until all of them have sensed something of the reality of the experience which led Lao Tse to the assurance that his Immortal Mother Above was bending over him in his last moments, and Christ to surrender unhesitatingly to the Father into whose hands he committed his spirit. And if anyone is thinking that this last is impossible for children, let me assure him that the childlike trust which has been the outstanding characteristic of the religion of the world's supreme spiritual masters is far more comprehensible to the child's mind than to the average mature one. It is this that convinces me that ethics is not enough, for to teach only ethics and withhold such things as these is to deny the children the very thing which they are most capable of entering into, and which will stand them in good stead later in the development of their own religion.

*Margaret Barr (d. 1973)*  
*from the introduction to The Great Unity – Lindsey Press 1937*

# possibilities



Sojourner Truth was a black American, a freed slave, who was an outspoken advocate of women's rights in the 19th century. She had to contend not only with sexism of a particularly brutal kind, but also with the racism of white women, including those in the women's rights movement. Bell Hooks, in her book *Ain't I a Woman* (Pluto Press 1982) says of Sojourner Truth: 'Unlike most white women's rights advocates, Sojourner Truth could refer to her own personal life experience as evidence of woman's ability to function as a parent; to be the work equal of man; to undergo persecution, physical abuse, rape, torture; and to not only survive but emerge triumphant.' Hooks reproduces a section of a speech made by Sojourner Truth in 1852, at a convention of the women's rights movement in Akron, Ohio:

... Well, children, whar dar is so much racket dar must be something out o' kilter. I tink dat 'twixt de niggers of de Souf and de women at de Norf all a talkin' 'bout rights, de white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all dis here talkin' 'bout? Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to have de best places ... and ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! ... I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me – and ain't I a woman? I could work as much as any man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well – and ain't I a woman? I have borne five children and I seen 'em mos' all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus hear – and ain't I a woman?

*Sojourner Truth (1797-1883)*  
*from Bell Hooks's book Ain't I a Woman – Pluto Press 1982*

## On Anger

It's had a healing effect on me  
It's replaced fear  
It's made me stronger  
It's cured my early formed  
long maintained

self effacement  
submissiveness  
silence

It's compelled me to ask  
Myself, you, everyone  
What is there not to be angry about  
What is there to accept about –  
Not being seen  
Only being used?  
I would be lesser  
If I weren't angry

angry at rarely being heard  
rarely being helped  
rarely being comforted

Who wouldn't be?  
Anger is a moving force  
Acceptance is static  
Anger is cathartic  
Acceptance is passive  
The people who demand a bodycount of tolerance  
Also demand a megaton of

my suppression  
my complicity  
my support

Accepting means going under  
If I smile and smile and smile  
Will I ever change?  
And will they?  
Anyway whether I withdraw myself  
With a smile or a scream  
The penalty is swift and sure

all women know this

Without anger to compel us  
None of us would

dare

## To M.L.K.

I made a chicken soup today,  
full of nourishment and care;  
I have no power to paint or sculpt,  
nor any other art as rare,

but with this small domestic skill,  
my cooking pots upon the stove,  
I try the best way that I can  
to give expression to my love.

*Rita Keyes*

## Intuition 'Let the light flow in'

Intuition ... '... the power of the mind by which it immediately perceives the truth of things without reasoning or analysis ...' is a dictionary definition of this gift which traditionally is the peculiar preserve of the female of the human race. 'Feminine intuition', that phrase spoken, usually in admiration, sometimes with mild derision and occasionally in determined scepticism appears to me, as I've known it anyway, to be much more than '... the power of the mind by which it immediately perceives the truth of things ...', etc. It is surely, also, within the field of emotional experience, a sensing within relationship with people, of understanding and empathy at a very deep level which often goes beyond people to intangibles ... at least, that is how I know of it. A message is received on the wavelength we learn to trust only by our inner certainties, our own inspiration, our own spark of the holy spirit. Through deep experiences of joy, of sorrow, of travail, it seems that one's awareness increases and one feels more and more exposed, more and more vulnerable, like an onion with the layers peeled off!

Intuition works at several levels and happens quite evidently to everyone, though women appear to have a greater sensitivity to it. Sometimes we receive it more clearly when our perceptions are heightened because of great emotional strain, when we are on that strange plateau when we seem suspended above reality, as in grave bereavement. We seem to know the true significance of 'depths of despair'; we understand, empathise, with all others who also go that way; we have 'intimations of immortality', to use Wordsworth's telling phrase. I think that at its highest level intuition is how we receive the experience of the divine spirit, the grace of God. It has been said that intuition is the bridge between humanity and God.

But as Unitarians, encouraged to base religious concepts on reason and conscience as the authorities for our beliefs, may we be free to trust our intuition?

James Martineau, in that 19th century Unitarian 'bible' *Seat of Authority in Religion* describes intuition as a 'gift of God'. Drawing an 'essential distinction' between natural religion (the religion we observe and rationalise) and revealed religion (the one we sense intuitively), both of which he acknowledges, he speaks of revelation through intuition as '... something given and not found', and of the need to '... let the light flow in'.

I find I *must* trust my intuition, though most of the time I lack confidence to do so. Daily attention to that inner revelation in the hustle and bustle that attends our modern world is a goal hard to achieve, but in order to keep our religious life in existence we need to try. This gift of God is '... so close to the soul, so folded in with the very centre of personal life that though it ever speaks it cannot be spoken of, though it shines everywhere, it can be looked at nowhere ...'. We apprehend it and there is nothing for the mind to do but 'let the light flow in'.

*Eleanor Dixon*

*Based on a short address given in the IALRW service Women's Gifts,  
at its regional rally, August 1982, in Croydon.*

### Thoughts on a music service or black dots

When you really come to think about it, what happens is something of a miracle. Many years ago someone heard a tune in their head – someone who had the capacity and knowledge to convert that tune into symbols and had the muscle power and co-ordination to lift a pen and skilfully inscribe black dots onto manuscript paper.

The years pass, the musical score lies forgotten in a library, to be found by a wandering music scholar who, having been taught the secret of the black dots and their interpretation, takes up the music, reads it, sings it half-aloud, plays it over on a modern instrument, then copies it out in modern notation so that we here today can read it, sing it, play it in praise of God.

And this whole miraculous process, involving as it does – the use of large muscles, hand-eye co-ordination, sight, hearing, sensation, the fine muscles which control the larynx, the ear, the eye, the throat and mouth, any or all of which are subject to the vagaries of disease – we take for granted and we play and sing with hardly a second thought.

Let us never take it for granted again.

*Jane Williams*

### Christmas gifts

Today as we celebrate the birth of one who is our continuing inspiration we exchange tangible gifts with one another.

But the best gifts of all are intangible and we think of them in our prayers.

Let us give thanks for the gift of renewed health and strength through the relief of suffering, the loving support of friends and family in times of crisis, and the skill of those whose professions are truly caring.

We give thanks for the forgiveness we see in the eyes of those whom we have hurt or offended. From that forgiveness stems healing love, contentment and ultimately peace.

We give thanks for freedom from the bondage which is our own making. Let us continue to break down these prison walls which separate us from the love which surrounds us.

Let the true value of these gifts dwell in our hearts and lives so that we can go on with fortitude and courage, inspiring others in our turn, that the Christmas message of Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All may be fulfilled.

*Jane Williams*

# GRIEF

### Widowhood (for M.M.)

The sorrow of widowhood has encompassed me  
in a cloud of darkness and pain:  
I am desolate, bewildered:  
Life is bereft of purpose, of colour:  
Time stretches before me like an unending wilderness.

Hands reach out to me to lighten my darkness,  
I take them with deep gratitude  
Afraid of holding them too long,  
Afraid of intruding upon others' security and contentment:  
I swiftly shrink into my shell of isolation.

And yet I know that others are stumbling through this darkness,  
That through countless ages  
Others have trod this way  
Wistfully wondering if ever there could be relief  
From fear and separation:  
My heart tells me with certitude  
That the light did break,  
That the weariness lessened,  
That colour returned.

O Thou who art the Source of my being,  
Help me to find the music in a songless world,  
To see the hint of blue in the darkened sky,  
To know again the clear delight of morning.

Help me to breast the waves of self-pity;  
Preserve me from the taloned claws of envy;  
Give me fortitude, patience and hope;  
Help me to find stillness in this storm of  
anguish, isolation and fear.

Though wearied now by ceaseless struggle to  
overcome grief, the immemorial pain of love –  
Grant that I find gradually a mounting strength,  
So that *my* hands can reach out  
To those who need what I can give  
In understanding and love.

*Muriel Hilton*

### Dream poem

I am the apple sauce upon the plate;  
you tilt the jar until you have enough  
and I am born.

But inside the jar is my background,  
history, heredity, my genes:  
only when the jar is empty will I know it all –  
and is that death?

*Rita Keyes*

A spontaneous flash of understanding came to me an hour or two after the birth of our first child: *'He will never remember today. His birth is chiefly experienced by me, his other relatives, the nurses, and the young mother in the next bed in this war-time hospital. So it may be in death? only others aware of our passing?'*

*Hilda Martin Hall*

### But that the dread

I looked today into the pit of hell  
And turned away  
Before I fell.

I have gone nigh and looked in there before,  
Before I die  
I shall look more.  
It is the place of absolute despair  
And what I face  
Is nothing there.

Not nothing-left, of dearth or stolen loss,  
Nor nothing-worth  
Of out-cast dross:  
Not the glad nothing-after-all relief  
Nor yet the sad  
Of empty grief.

The deaf or blind that nothing hears or sees:  
The nought I find  
Is none of these.  
It is the stark and steel-cold certainty  
That empty dark  
Can surely be.

It is to know the pain of naked bone  
That one can go  
At last alone.  
It is to see that every vow can fail,  
And all love be  
An ended tale.  
It is to fear that God can barren strip  
All close and dear  
Relationship:

Not to have faith in loving any more,  
But see as wraith  
All that was sure.  
All emptied there, with nothing I can give,  
I cannot care  
Yet I must live.

Life does not heed our human qualities  
Or human need.  
Life only is.  
And being still alive, I still must be.  
Not of my will  
Is life in me.

So in despair I fled that stark despair  
For greater dread  
Of nothing there;  
And I will choose the way that all must take  
To win or lose  
On every stake.

The chances are hell will not come my way  
All being well.  
Well then – I'll play!

*June Bell*

When the bruising shock is over you will resume the confident centre of all you know to be true. Do we see each other again? Why not? – since the qualities of which we are compounded are *spiritual* and that is why they are eternal. Although one may think it is the way a person *looks, walks, laughs, shape of head, etc.*, that are the man, surely the fact is that it is the warmth of understanding, humour, kindness of a generous heart, wisdom, selflessness, etc., that are *really* what one loves and knows and acknowledges to be the actual and the eternal.

*Joyce Grenfell (d. 1979)*  
*from An Invisible Friendship by J. Grenfell and K. Moore*  
*Futura Press, McDonald and Co.*

It is the woes that cannot in any earthly way be escaped that admit least earthly comforting. Of all trite, worn-out, hollow mockeries of comfort that were ever uttered by people who will not take the trouble of sympathising with others, the one I dislike the most is the exhortation not to grieve over an event, 'for it cannot be helped'. Do you think if I could help it, I would sit still with folded hands, content to mourn? Do you not believe that as long as hope remained I would be up and doing? I mourn because what has occurred cannot be helped. The reason you give me for not grieving is the very and sole reason of my grief. Give me nobler and higher reasons for enduring meekly what my Father sees fit to send, and I will try earnestly and faithfully to be patient; but mock me not, or any other mourner, with the speech, 'Do not grieve, for it cannot be helped. It is past remedy.'

*Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65)  
from Mary Barton*

YOUNG  
AND  
OLD

And so the children come,  
And so they have been coming.  
Always in the same way they come –  
Born of the seed of man and woman.  
No angels herald their beginnings.  
No prophets predict their future courses.  
No wise men see a star to point their way  
to find the babe that may save humankind.

Yet each night a child is born is a holy night.  
Fathers and Mothers –  
Sitting beside their children's cribs –  
Feel glory in the wond'rous sight of a life beginning.  
They ask: 'When or how will this new life end?  
Or will it ever end?'  
Each night a child is born is a holy night.

*Sophia Lyon Fahs  
from Each Night a Child is Born  
in Worshipping Together with Questioning Minds  
Unitarian Universalist Association*

**For my grandson, Cristian Sandres,  
born in Rosario, Argentina**

This child whose blood is mixed  
Belongs to both sides of the Atlantic,  
North and South.  
Anglo-Saxon, Celtic,  
Latin-American, Spanish,  
The nations run through his veins.  
The two strands of his inner spiral  
Fuse at different temperatures  
The hot blood of the Latin,  
The coolness of the Anglo-  
In this scrap are compatible.

Will it be Dylan Thomas or Lorca  
Who intoxicate him with their words?  
Will it be Rodriguez or Elgar  
Who trigger the vibrating of his ear?  
Will it be the waltz or tango  
That move his feet to dance?

This child whose blood is mixed  
Belongs to both sides of the Atlantic.

*Dawn Buckle*

### **The old woman**

Now she is old  
She wears her beauty like a garment frayed  
That can no longer bear the needle's pain;  
No cloth of Spring can patch the heart betrayed  
By autumn gossamer.

From years of chopping sticks and baking bread  
Her twisted hands lie still:  
And children's voices shouting on the hill  
Fall quiet on her ears, and from her tread  
The willow-spring has gone.  
Her speedwell eyes  
Are grey with mist and dreams and distances.  
But soon she'll fold her weariness away  
And put on all the colour of the skies.

*Phoebe Hesketh*

### Winter sunshine

(lines to a friend on her 90th birthday)

We who are country bred and know her love,  
Watch through each passing month for glories seen before.  
The hawthorn buds, the tender green of shooting corn,  
The rainbow pageant of a July morn;  
Beacons of fiery leaves which Autumn sets ablaze,  
Dying through pale November into ethereal greys;  
And then the winter sleeps.

All this is known – recalled – awaited.

But sometimes in that gentle waiting time, quiet and contained  
Between the harvesting and the return of Spring –

A sudden glory leaps.

A startled glance, amazed, we fling;

The fields, the copse, the hedgerow and the homeward hill,

Are flooded with a glow so radiant and so bright

As seems a glimpse of Heaven, not earthly sight.

The eternal fields are lit.

So here for us to view,

Are all the garnered graces of your bygone years

Like winter sunshine, falling across your face.

Sunshine which yet gleamed bright in spring and summer days

Gilds and transfigures with its winter's rays;

Piercing our gloom and banishing our tears.

We are the happy ones; we have been led by you

Into the heart of friendship, radiant with the accepted grace

Of Glory Uncreated.

*Amy Blake (1890-1979)*

# LIVING



Life! I know not what thou art,  
But know that thou and I must part –  
And when, or how, or where we met  
I own to me's a secret yet.

Life! We've been long together  
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;  
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear  
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;  
Then steal away, give little warning,  
Choose thine own time;  
Say not Good-night – but in some brighter clime  
Bid me Good-Morning.

*Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825)*

In crises it is possible for a part of our being to be still continually aware of the holy presence. The old desultory surface self, that wasted time glancing down at the newspaper advertisements and reaching out to every stimulus in the environment, has been dealt a blow. But as time goes on we recover, and with recovery comes choice. Either we can slide back into surface living again or we can gain new life from our true centre in the divine, and the seed known in the silence can begin to grow steadily.

While under the heel of life myself, I knew an extraordinary ecstasy of being nothing; that is of knowing myself as simply a thing, like mud, worms, clouds, trees and water: and from this there arose an ability to enter into the thingness of the world, and to know it as spiritually alive. Since then I have taken up painting, especially figures in movement and faces, for which I had no flair before.

Down at the bottom, too, I made the discovery that there is a *rock*. This rock was there solid under my feet just when it seemed I might disintegrate as a person altogether. It was here that I had to find a way to say 'Into thy hands ...' and then it was as though I were split open, and after that I knew myself in quite a new way, as a vessel, a channel, a container for the livingness of life. And this released me from being so torn by tension, feelings of guilt, or by obsessional desires.

Life began to live me, instead of me so busily living life.

*Damaris Parker-Rhodes (d. 1986)  
from Swarthmore Lecture 1977,  
Truth: A Path not a Possession, A Quaker Woman's Journey*

## Atonement

There is a moment  
When I, my resolution, the rain dripping trees  
And God are one:  
Without and within  
Intersect,  
Come together, fuse,  
Merge.  
In that moment  
Something which is outside me touches me:  
In that moment  
Something which is in me reaches out  
And melts into that which is outside.  
There is no me,  
There is no other.  
In that moment  
Of total integration  
My arms embrace the universe  
And I am cradled in infinite space.

*Elizabeth Rogers*

Filled to the brim, and brimming  
Over, flowing full and free,  
Radiant and warm, and washing  
Over: rock receiving sea.  
Pain beyond knowing, killing  
Reason, flows relentlessly,  
Waves of warmth and joy, surging,  
Exclaiming this ecstasy:  
Love of God and love of Man,  
A holy intermingling.  
Waves of joy and pain, creating  
Over: rock receiving sea,  
Filled to the brim, and brimming  
Over, flowing full and free.

*Elizabeth Rogers*

### Dusk question

'Where are you now?' the person asked.

'Here, listening to the shore gulls,' I answered, the beach sand stretching damp into the gathering dusk, pungent with drying seaweed.

'No, I mean in fall,' came the reply, the future imperative of identification with place. And I thought back several months, to being asked where I wanted to be in five years.

I had refused to answer them, even as I hesitate now. For the moment has been too often lost in past times by planning for tomorrow. Now is too precious to waste. It is only here I can encounter the universe. This energy of today is mine; not that of past or precognition, but of the eternal present. Here.

Let each dawn bring us to that day: to find this moment the continuity of space and time to which we are each heir.

*Cynthia J. Edson*

### My lady, the moon

They were burned as witches, our predecessors who lived by herbs and the moon. It is still sometimes unsafe to admit those connections: but less safe still to deny them when the very pulse in one's veins responds as do tides to the forces of energy around us.

My lady, the moon, hear our prayers to your four quarters in the comings and goings of our busy lives. Bless the creativity of our thoughts and let us control the fertility of our wombs to bring Peace to the public policies about us.

*Cynthia J. Edson*

### Holy Spirit

Open your arms, that I may feel your love.  
Open my eyes, that I may see your face.  
Open my ears, that I may hear your voice.  
Open my mind, that I may understand what you say to me.  
Give me the strength to bear whatever you ask of me.  
Give me the patience to understand what others have to do.  
Give me the light to show the way to peace within.  
Give me the love to fulfil my life, and help others to do the same.

*Margaret Hill*

Spirit of life – it is said that you are love –  
but what is love?  
It is said that you are truth –  
but what is truth?  
It is said that you are power –  
but what is power?  
You are mystery beyond comprehension –  
but the mystery only serves to magnify your presence.  
Even whilst not completely understanding  
We give thanks for life.  
It is precious, especially when we fear that we might  
lose it – only then do we truly value it.  
We give thanks for love.  
We feel it within, we see it without  
It is a force so strong – yet where did it come from?  
We give thanks for joy.  
It surges through us when we least expect it – filling  
us so – that at times we feel we cannot contain it.  
We give thanks for Peace.  
Peace deep down within. When all around is turbulent  
frustration, that still small voice speaks  
so softly, 'Be calm – may peace be with you.'  
We give thanks.  
Amid all the bewilderment and confusion we  
rejoice in the wonder of life itself.  
It is a gift that we have been given.  
May we use it wisely and well.

*Ann Latham*

### The spirit within

What is this deep within me that I cannot understand;  
Perhaps you will come and lead me and take me by the hand?  
Please God what's this so deep within –  
Help me its life to understand.  
Oh! for the old days so often quoted,  
Where golden silence needs not be noted.

What is this deep within me that will cradle all my years;  
And fills my heart with longings and burns my eyes with tears?  
Alas these modern metal schemes,  
Tied piece to piece with yards of wire,  
Now carry heavy clicks and noisy moans –  
At which my inner spirit groans.

What is this deep within me that I cannot now express;  
That gives me joy or loneliness and sometimes emptiness?  
The moan of winds on lonely hills  
Reminds me you are with me still.  
The ripple of water upon the lake  
Stirs my dull senses; I know you're awake.

What is this deep within me that causes me great alarm;  
Perhaps you'll give me comfort with the still small voice of calm?  
The loving comfort that you give,  
I treasure always dearest God.  
Your Holy Spirit ever fills my room,  
Encircling my form like a mother's womb.

What is this deep within me that I cannot understand?  
It is your Love, Holy Spirit, dearest God!

*Janet M. Ford*

I come in the little things,  
Saith the Lord;  
Not borne on morning wings  
Of majesty; but I have set My feet  
Amidst the delicate and bladed wheat  
That springs triumphant in the furrowed sod.  
There do I dwell, in weakness and in power;  
Not broken or divided, saith our God!  
In your straight garden plot I come to flower;  
About your porch My Vine,  
Meek, fruitful, doth entwine;  
Waits, at the threshold, Love's appointed hour.

*Evelyn Underhill, (d.1941)  
from Inner Light*

### The call of the soul

Come into the house of peace.  
Thrust wide the windows onto the melting day.  
The play is ending  
The fretting and the spending  
Done ... for now.

Drink deep of the silence.  
Rest in the flaming beauty of the setting sun.  
What use the spilling  
The fruitless endless willing  
Of the day just gone?

Is it an ending or a beginning?  
The prelude to the darkness of falling night  
Or the coming of light?  
Be calm and still my soul  
You know.

You speak not with the words of men;  
Meaningless words of cunning and contrivance.  
You speak through the symbols of time  
Time passing ... time coming.  
You are silence.

That creative silence from which the whole appeared.  
To which we all are moving and returning.  
Step out now into the mystery  
And the wonder all about you.  
And live.

*Joan Evans*

## Memory

I flung some pebbles on the pool,  
The quiet pool where willows lean,  
And watched the ripples that they made  
Until the pool came still and green.

Memory is like that pool –  
The loveless things, the griefs and pains,  
The storms of anguish – these recede,  
Only the shining peace remains.

*Muriel Hilton*

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