

# Experience of the Spirit in Our Lives

By June Etta Chenard

**A**S WE GATHERED ON SUNDAY EVENING, ALREADY THE MOVEMENT OF THE SPIRIT HAD BEGUN TO STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITY at Sedbergh School in Montebello, Québec. Earlier, the stories told during the intergenerational meeting for worship had warmed young and old alike. Now, Jo Vellacott, clerk of Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel, gathered us in with a reading by Lloyd Lee Wilson, “The simple life is one in which there is always time to remember the divine purpose behind each of our tasks, time to listen for a possible divine amendment to the day’s schedule, and time to be thankful for the divine presence at each moment of the day.” Thus, we were led into the quiet where Friends spoke of simplicity and personal experiences of the Spirit in our lives.

Jo was the first to speak of her experience, “Growing older does help simplify life in some ways: more time, more flexibility in time. Though I still manage to get over-busy and over-scheduled, I have had time over the past year to realise what a boon it can be to have a chance for more peace and quiet, which we all need, no matter what stage of life we’re at.”

Next, Dan Cooperstock introduced us to the concept of worship-sharing, and its great sense of peace and leisure. He quoted Patricia Loring and her favourite image of centring on “a quiet pool of water in the sunlight.” He also told us of his favourite quote regarding simplicity — from Albert Einstein, “Always make everything as simple as possible, but no simpler.”

Clare Adamson reminded us that one of the simple things to do is just to be silent and listen.

Then, Bert Horwood told us of seeking simplicity in his images for God. One of his images seems to be complex, complicated and contradictory. But in the silence of this evening, a quote of astronomer Arthur Eddington (who may have been quoting Isaac Newton) had come to him, “I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”

Next, David Male, a Friend visiting from Cleveland

Monthly Meeting of Ohio Yearly Meeting, told us of two prayers. The first, discovered in desperation, is powerful and always answered, “God, help me.” The second is even more powerful, and a prayer God loves to hear, “God, use me.”

Ed Abbott shared with us the simplest and most meaningful prayer he ever made — at a time when their children were small. Up on a mountain in the spring, a stream was rushing into a nearby culvert. Suddenly, they noticed that their little son, Bill, was missing. “Oh, God!” Even now, Ed’s resonant voice broke as he retold that story of long ago. Fortunately, Bill was discovered soon after, playing at a nearby neighbour’s house.

Steve Fick spoke of a conversation he had had at work last winter in which he had said he felt he needed a sabbatical after his 15 years there, but that he could not see how that could come about. A few months later, he woke up one day unable to move. Having suffered a serious back injury, his body was providing that sabbatical. He feels that the considerable pain will not be remembered as much as the considerable spiritual gifts will be. One of those is a simpler life or attitude towards life. For instance, recently, he was unable to paint because of the pain, so he lay down on the floor in his art studio and looked out the skylight, watching the clouds and the birds, and the subtle shifts in light in the changing sky. “Appreciating the beauty of something so basic, I am grateful for the gift which brought more simplicity in my life.”

**D**onald Laitin told us how the term “a vessel of the Spirit” speaks to him on his life journey, and how the work to be that vessel is what is so powerful. He thinks of the vulnerability, the openness to be that vessel, the testing of the self as we move along — never being certain and realising that the vulnerability is part of the strength of the vessel of the Spirit.

Kathleen Hertzberg said she feels that only the absolute strictest honesty with one’s self and one’s inner life is the basis of the dialogic relationship with God. The most important thing for the inner life is that

we must never let ourselves be separated from our relationship with God. That dialogic relationship can often only be expressed in the actions of our lives. “We thank God that He continues with us in our lives and will not let us go.”

Marilyn Manzer next recounted how, during the last five summers, she has worked as a cook for her brother who takes people on Rocky Mountain wilderness vacations. At the beginning of this summer, she was hurt when she and her horse fell. Her right leg was so badly injured, she could not even walk well, and they were a two and a half hour ride from their base camp. It was decided that she would remain there where she was, alone with nobody within a twelve-mile radius, until their return, three days later. Previously, she would have been terrified by that prospect and, even now, her first reaction was, “Oh, no!” Her second thought was that it was better than riding sixteen hours a day, flat out. So, there she was, with not even much food. Alone, she had simple needs — looking after herself, listening to music, reading. She found that to be alone in the midst of such beauty was an incredible experience. “I think I’ll always treasure that time.”

**G**ordon McClure told us he doesn’t pray for the world or himself to be changed, but for courage — courage to see things a little more clearly. “If I have the courage to open my eyes to see a little more of what’s here, I will be content. I will be free. God, give me courage!”

Last spring when Maxine Kauffman-Lacusta got new glasses, her eye exam was done by a student. During the exam, Maxine mentioned that she was usually not able to see in three-dimensions. Later, with her new glasses, however, she began having headaches, *and* she began to spontaneously see more and more often in 3-D. So she called the student, who told Maxine that she had done something to the prescription so Maxine’s eyes might learn to see in 3-D. Though the commonly held belief is that such an adjustment must be made when the person is three or four years old, the student had decided that since Maxine could sometimes see that way, maybe her eyes could learn to do it more and more. And so it is that, since the spring, Maxine can see the shapes of leaves and flowers and trees — a simple gift of something she’s never had before.

Beverly Shepard reminded us that we already have a lot of our simple gifts — we are born with them. Bev

once had a room-mate who was deaf in one ear. Once, upon returning home, Bev found her room-mate with earphones on, listening to music, with tears running down her face. With the music being transmitted through the bones of her ears, she was able to hear all the beautiful sounds for the first time. Though Bev doesn’t think of this every day, she does think of it a lot: how blessed she is for every one of her ordinary faculties.

Tuulia Law spoke of the gift of simple laughter. Where she works as a cook, they have a great time and laugh a lot. A few days ago, Tuulia had chopped her finger while chopping vegetables. A friend went with her to the Hospital Emergency and kept making jokes; in fact, they laughed so much, they could hardly contain themselves. In that stern environment, their simple giggling made the environment warm.

Helen Stevens, a Friend visiting us from Britain Yearly Meeting with the *Turning the Tide* project, remembered Dag Hammerskjold saying that we presume God has infinite time for us though we do not have much time for God. Recently, upon retirement, Helen had moved to an isolated, rural community, where the first thing she had to do was to visit her neighbours and introduce herself. When they first invited her in for tea, she said no, for she didn’t think she had enough time. This, she learned, was a huge social blunder. And she found out that so much is learned from simply having cups of tea with the neighbours. Through these tea times, she has learned not only much about time, but also much about God.

We were reminded by Jane Zavitz-Bond that if we can find out what we need, and not become hoarders of what we don’t need, we can have more balance and simplicity in our lives.

Then Jo Vellacott tenderly said that she would be moved to end this session with a song. Soon, the room was filled with the beautiful sounds of Friends singing this verse from an old favourite by Raffi:

*All I really need is a song in my heart,  
Food in my belly and love in my family.  
All I really need is a song in my heart  
And love in my family. ✨*

And we were abundantly blessed with all of these.

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