

Refresh

Journal of Contemplative Spirituality
Volume 19 Number 1, Winter 2018.



Seize Life!



Volume 19, Number 1. Winter 2018. ISSN: 1176-3477

Published by: SPIRITUAL GROWTH MINISTRIES TRUST.

36 Buller Crescent, Manurewa, Auckland 2102, New Zealand.

Spiritual Growth Ministries is an incorporated trust registered with the Charities Commission on 17 June 2008 (cc 26037). Donations to 03 0166 0198782 000 and on our website <https://www.sgm.org.nz/donate.html>

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SGM Contacts www.sgm.org.nz

Admin:

Joanne Garton, 36 Buller Crescent, Manurewa, Auckland 2102; 09 2675957; admin@sgm.org.nz

Workgroup Convenor:

Jane Wilkinson janeinwelly@gmail.com

Spiritual Directors Formation Programme Coordinator:

Fran Francis, 14 Oruamo Place, Beach Haven, Auckland 0626; 09 4191152; fran.francis@sgm.org.nz

Desktop Publishing and Printing:

Advocate Print, Rotorua

Refresh Editor:

Diane Gilliam-Weeks, 32 Kauri Street, Eastbourne, Hutt City; 0274978374; dianegw@actrix.co.nz

Cover Image

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Come and play by Marilyn Wilkinson

God said to me, 'Come and play!'
I said, 'Really?'
You know I'm getting on in years
and because of this I take longer to do things.
So thanks for the offer, but perhaps another day.'

Another day God said to me, 'Come and play!'
I said, 'Oh gosh,
I'm on this journey of reflection.
You led me here. You stirred my heart.
You have helped me to see myself.
I feel as if I'm making progress.
So, thanks it was a lovely thought, but I don't want to get distracted.'

Another day God said to me, 'Come and play!'
I said, 'I thought I was already playing with you God.
When the time is right
I'm doing cartwheels in your bush.
I'm wallowing in your ocean.
My heart pumps as I climb your mountains.
I love the games I can still play and I know you are part of them.'

But God kept on.
'I have another game. Will you come and play?'
I said, 'You mean there's another game I can play with you?'
I thought I had you sussed.
There is the universe, the cosmos,
there is this amazing earth with all its creatures and life.
There is me and mine.
You have showered me with so much and I'm tied up with it all.
You are so much part of my wonder and my activity.
I'm loving this game.
Don't you think that's enough and anyway I can't believe that there is more.'

But God said, 'Will you play Hide and Seek?'
I said, 'God this does not surprise me!
Often over the years I have felt that you've been hiding from me.
Games are meant to be fun but honestly those times were far from fun.'



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But God said 'I want YOU to hide my child.

I want you to curl up into a ball, with a blanket over you,
and I want you to disappear from sight.
I want you to be very quiet.
I want you to be so, so still.
That is your part in this game.

You must leave the activity to me.

When I find you,
then you can jump up with bright eyes,
and the two of us can delight
that we now inhabit the same space,
and perhaps you will say, "Let's play again!"

'God, I see now that I have become too much the activist.
Too centred on my part in the journey,
when actually, the most important player here isn't me at all.

Thanks for keeping asking.
Thanks for the light now shining.
Thanks for finding me.
Thank you, thank you, thank you.'

Surrender to love: life to the full

by Maggie Quinlan

As I pass through the Valley of Baka,
Self-pity overwhelms me.
Lost, disillusioned and angry.
O Lord, I cannot understand.
You promised to lead me in the way I should go.
I thought I knew that path.
But it is blocked!
My vision has died.
Lord, shed your light and love on this death.
I am excluded and rejected like a leper.

But!

I had forgotten the deep love of my Beloved.
He chose me as His dwelling place, the core of my own being.
He leads me to a place of springs and autumn pools.
Death leads to resurrection.
In Jesus I have life, and have it to the full.
My Friend wants me to learn of Him.
He wants me to be startled by His presence!
Just lie back in the water and float
In the river of life. Be swept along in His love.

Let go!

Surrender your whole being to His love.
May His whole will and nature be mine
He leads me into a different way of living.
There may be added burdens. The route may be complex.

Whatever!

God loves me with an amazing love;
Just as I am, despite my faults;
Steeped in God's love for eternity.
He knows where I am best to be used.
His heart is my heart.

Watch out!

Together we are dynamite!
God's love will prevail!

The conscious cosmos and the mechanics of life

by Jeffery Tallon

We are created for life, contemplation, and understanding

The universe consists of one fine-tuned improbability compounded upon another. Equally, the biological world, which planet Earth supports, is a cascade of seemingly miraculous improbabilities. As a scientist, I can say our measured vocabulary is insufficient to communicate the manifest miracle of both life and non-life.

The scientist is focused on determining what is true, yet we must progress from veracity to verity, if we're to perceive meaning in the universe. Isaac Newton once wrote, 'Truth is the offspring of silence and unbroken meditation'. This is just as applicable to the search for spiritual truth.

And whether spiritual or scientific, our search is never merely an individual enterprise. It's always and essentially the collective undertaking of many. As Newton also declared, 'If I've seen further, it's only by standing on the shoulders of giants'.

Neither the march of science, nor our understanding of God are ultimately dependent on individuals. If there'd never been a Newton or an Einstein, today's advances in science may have been paused a few years – but only a few.

In science, the result of this collective enterprise is nothing short of spectacular. Today we can trace the origins of the universe back to the first tiniest fraction of a second.

Using measuring instruments, we can observe objects utterly imperceptible to our five senses – from quarks and the Higgs boson – to black holes and gravitational waves. And it seems we don't even need instrumentation to know these objects exist. They can be predicted theoretically, and emerge from mathematics as inescapable realities.

**The universe must in various ways
carry the imprint of createdness
and this can be tested.**

The abstract constructs of the mind seem somehow intimately attuned to the Universe and its operation. Einstein insisted his general theory of gravitation was the result of a 'thought experiment'. His mathematics predicted black holes 50 years before they were contemplated – let alone demonstrated.

In 1917, Einstein forecast gravitational waves travel at the speed of light. Yet not until 2017 could his theory be tested. Scientists were able to measure the simultaneous (within 1.7 seconds) arrival of electromagnetic radiation (gamma rays) and gravitational waves from an event that occurred 160 million years ago showing Einstein was correct to one part in 2,000,000,000,000,000!

Mathematics developed in the 19th century as a purely abstract exercise of the mind, is now considered applicable to the deepest functions of the universe. These are spectacular triumphs of the human intellect.



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It is usual in such musings to extol the marvels and endlessly-varied pageant of the universe about us; and that is of course appropriate. These are God-given and rich in beauty, symmetry and complex fecundity. But the greater marvel surely – is the human mind – not only capable of understanding the universe, but actually insisting it must behave in a certain manner; black holes *must* exist whether we can see them or not, Neutron stars are invisible but mathematically they *must* exist and are confirmed to exist by their influence on other observations.

The capacity of the human mind to wonder, question, create models and test them as a means to new understanding is seemingly unlimited. It's fashionable to talk about artificial intelligence (AI) soon outstripping the human mind. Really? An Oxford mathematician even proposed assigning human rights to AI machines. Really?

What do we know about the human brain beyond the accomplishments above?

It comprises some 100 billion neurons – as many as stars in our Milky Way Galaxy. But what sets the brain apart is its interconnectivity – each neuron connects to between 20,000 and 100,000 other neurons. This interconnectivity is laid down in the developing fetus at an average rate of some 8 billion interconnections every minute – without even having to think about it. As the Psalmist stated 'You Lord, knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made'.

And that's just the beginning. It was previously assumed each neuron in the human brain was essentially identical. Now, it's been found, each one of these 100 billion neurons is both genetically and epigenetically unique – a computer in its own right.

The brain is mind-bogglingly energy efficient. IBM claims that 100 of its Blue-Genie supercomputers would achieve the processing power of a single human brain. Each Blue-Genie runs on about 4 MW (4 million watts of power) while the human brain, at full concentration, uses a meagre 7 watts. But the Director of the European Brain Project says the full processing capability of the human brain is more likely equivalent to 10,000 of these supercomputers. Either way, our brains are somewhere between 60 million and 6 billion times more energy efficient than our best supercomputers.

Already the world uses 8% of its entire energy consumption to power computers and it is growing at a rate of 70% a year. The idea of widespread AI on a par with the human brain is not only technically unrealistic, it's energetically unrealistic.

And by the way, the human brain produces 1.6 billion times less CO₂ emissions than the equivalent assembly of supercomputers! The Psalmist knew nothing of this, yet instinctively understood the utter uniqueness and complexity of the human frame.

Our 1.3 kg of 'grey matter' is the most complex object in the Universe. Of course, its proper functioning is deeply affected by our upbringing. Sadly, life trauma not only affects its function but its very physical structure – often on a permanent basis.

But with this organ, we understand and communicate incredibly complex notions, we appreciate beauty, we compose music and art for each other's enjoyment, we laugh, exult and weep; we unravel the secrets of the universe and we engage with our Creator in whose image we are made.

With this organ, consciousness is incarnate in an otherwise material and inorganic cosmos. It is the rational tool with which we distinguish fact from fancy and foster a cogent faith. It is curiously compelling, isn't it, that Jesus added the word 'mind' to the great Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4/5, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and *with all your mind* and with all your strength'. Mark 12:29/30.

Accordingly, true faith isn't a blind faith constructed from our pet fancies; it isn't even an *individual faith*, freed of the constraints of tradition, custom and creed. Just as Newton asserted he stood on the shoulders of giants, so we build on the understanding and wisdom of generations before us, giants of faith and faith-in-practice who stand as beacons to us today.

And just as scientific truth is predicated on evidence, so is Christian truth rooted and grounded in evidence. The very claim the Universe is created must, in part, be a scientific question because it's a claim as to historical veracity. The universe must in various ways carry the imprint of createdness – and this can be tested.

With this organ consciousness is incarnate in an otherwise material and inorganic cosmos.

Only in the past five or six decades has the true fabric of the cosmos been unravelled in this regard. And what we find is that everything is in astonishingly fine balance; everything is incredibly unlikely.

In the first moments of the big bang, the density of the expanding universe had to possess a critical value in order to survive. Any denser, and it would have collapsed in a big crunch; any less dense, and it would have expanded too rapidly for galaxies, stars and planets ever to form. This fine balance required an astonishing precision of one part in 10⁵⁵ (1 with 55 zeroes after it)!

Many other such examples exist, compounding one improbability on another. As the Psalmist marveled, 'the heavens declare the glory of God' – the march of science only reveals how true this is.

When we turn to the machinery of life, molecular biology, we find these improbabilities are further compounded one upon another. Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of the double-helix structure of DNA, wrote 'An honest man could only state that in some sense, the origin of life appears to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions that have to be satisfied to get it going'. I would delete the word 'almost'. Today biology is found to be vastly more complex than Crick ever understood it to be.

During the 1990's the big push was to sequence the human genome with the understanding the essential coding for human life would be revealed. The project cost US\$1 billion – and of course opened up valuable insights into the coded biochemistry of life. Yet biology is now understood to be far more complex than the mere encryption of 100,000 different proteins employed in the body's structure and metabolism. Indeed, a recent article in the journal *Nature*, entitled *Life is complex*, asks whether we'll ever fully understand the molecular biology of life.

As to how the genetic apparatus ever bootstrapped itself into existence remains a deep puzzle to researchers. Just consider a single minor example, that of the nuclear pore – the doorway between the nucleus and the cell that allows only messenger RNA to pass. In an exquisite choreography of events and molecular machinery, mRNA is copied as a negative image of a length of DNA coding for a specific protein. The mRNA and nothing else, passes outside through the nuclear pore by effectively swiping a security card at the entrance. It then proceeds, out of the nucleus, to a ribosome which reads its cypher and manufactures the desired protein in the correct sequence.

The entire process is mind-bogglingly complex, as is the apparatus, but the humble nuclear pore itself is manufactured from 100 individual proteins forming a seven-fold symmetric portico that faithfully opens and closes as, and only as, required.

And here we have yet another chicken-and-egg riddle: namely, that the nuclear pores are needed to manufacture proteins but the pores are themselves manufactured from proteins. The same riddle applies to the ribosome. It comprises some 80 distinct proteins and needs another 200 distinct proteins to synthesize it. Yet, despite their complexity and the huge scope for error, ribosomes in the bone marrow (assisted by the humble nuclear pores) manufacture 100,000 billion hemoglobin molecules every second! We are indeed 'wonderfully made'.

These things deserve all of Newton's 'silence and unbroken meditation' – for the truth of such matters is all too easily crowded out by the clamour of modern life. Though we often don't see it we are surrounded by signs of createdness. And if createdness is the very factual character of the universe, then it is purposeful, and indeed personal.

The heavens – and everything beneath them – declare the glory of the Creator. It is our epic vocation in life to find Him and worship Him in spirit and in truth.

A call to reverduranceⁱ

Many look at the world only from the standpoint of being fallen.

For others, the world provides the only meaning – they perceive neither the sublime, nor the spiritual.

But, didn't the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection change everything?

On the one hand, a habit of spiritual practice and awareness can endow the soul with a kind of intuitive perception of the Divine in all creation. This brings a kind of x-ray vision of peace in all circumstances. On the other hand, there's an equally instinctive realization of the vanity of clinging to any created reality as the end of things.

All things have a place in this journey, where we respond to, participate in, and move through culture, religion, media, self – and beyond – in a world that no longer envelops nor dominates.

This way of interior passage, to me, is a calling to *reverdure*, a challenge as well as discipline.

Reverdure is a French word for 'restoring the life of a natural area, to become green with growth again, to recover, to heal. I see it as a way of cultivating care in careless times, as a way of going through one's life in order to come to life, and persevering in the midst of deadening forces. In short, reverdurance means enduring with reverence.

Each day I wake up, I'm challenged to affirm the Life of a world that obscures it, a world that seems to deny its own life. My actions feel so small, like desperately opening windows or doors to let the breeze be felt by others who prefer artificial air; it's such a fleeting small act, hardly heroism.

The temptation is to give up in futility, to let the Commotion sweep you off your two feet. But with enough reverdurance we resume living our lives – replanting our roots in the healing silence.

ⁱ Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal*, Profile Books Ltd, United Kingdom (2015), also on a *Frontline Documentary* available online at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/being-mortal> See book review page 42.

Am I the beloved of God?

By Val Chapman

I'm a contemplative, who practises wordless silence in being with God, simplicity of life, prayer, openness, listening and accepting vulnerability. These disciplines give me strength and draw me to live as the beloved of God. [Though, I still need to slow down, be still and more silent!]

God tells us we're his beloved. He's called us by name, and we are his. As the beloved, God desires us to live the fullness of life in him.

So, if God has called us by name, that raises a question for me.

I was named Rosemary for four months, and when adopted, Valerie. So, how does that work?

Researching the name 'Rosemary', one definition is 'a giver of love'. Two Biblical references come to mind, John 3:16, and Ephesians 3:17-19. Attributes for Rosemary are: kind hearted, a sense of responsibility, devotion, affection, and involvement. The name also suggests accepting another in loyalty and seeking their wellbeing.

Looking up the name 'Valerie', I find it suggests 'a strong person'. Biblical references are Ephesians 6:10, and Isaiah 40:31. Attributes: honesty, respectability, strength, an uncompromising commitment to righteousness, trust, worthiness, justice and love. And the source mentions: God's grace is sufficient, for his power is made perfect in weakness, hardships, insults and difficulties.

Particularly since becoming a Christian, many of these characteristics have come to the fore. And each of scriptures given has played a significant role in my Christian journey.

When I gave birth to my very premature daughter, my husband and I hadn't thought of a name. What came to us was 'Rosemary'. At that point, I had no idea Rosemary was my birth name.

And I can see in my daughter's life, a strong out-working of the attributes given for her name. I know we're both chosen by God, both beloved of God and blessed by God, even though we're following different paths.

Being adopted, I'm very much aware my parents deliberately chose me.

They sought me. They chose me because they wanted me. They acted in deep love.

I was precious to them, and they loved me, gave me all the guidance, support care and wisdom I could ever need. I will always be extremely grateful to them.

I understand a little bit about
what it means to be chosen by
God as his beloved child.



Michael James
Photography

© Michael James Photography

So, I understand a little about what it means to be chosen by God as his beloved child. I receive these blessings and know I'm to pass them on to others.

As a contemplative, through prayer, in silence, and awareness of the presence of God all around us, we grow to understand our blessedness, and this in turn enables us to give to others.

This world which holds so much suffering and brokenness, needs great healing. And I found that just as God travels with me to bring my healing, God enables me to walk with others in their difficult time. Although my brokenness and pain are still there – as part of my history - I can now recall these things within God's peace and love. And greater joy comes when we share ourselves with another.

The first time I was named, I was a tiny baby presumably unaware – consciously anyway – of the presence of God. Yet, God has taken me back to those first four months, and powerfully healed the memories of abuse. God empowered me to forgive my birth mother from the time of my conception to the moment the authorities removed me from her. I now know God was there, for I was his beloved.

When I reflect back on how amazing my loving, adoptive parents were throughout my childhood and everything that happened in my life this far, I can see that God was always with me, for I am his beloved. I know God is the source of all life and goodness, and excels in his love for me. I will always be the beloved of God.

My two names are not in conflict: for when I was Rosemary, I was the beloved of God, and when I am Valerie, I am the beloved of God.

Now I Become Myself

by May Sarton

Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces,
Run madly, as if Time were there,
Terribly old, crying a warning,
"Hurry, you will be dead before—"

(What? Before you reach the morning?
Or the end of the poem is clear?
Or love safe in the walled city?)

Now to stand still, to be here,
Feel my own weight and density!
The black shadow on the paper
Is my hand; the shadow of a word
As thought shapes the shaper
Falls heavy on the page, is heard.
All fuses now, falls into place
From wish to action, word to silence,
My work, my love, my time, my face
Gathered into one intense
Gesture of growing like a plant.
As slowly as the ripening fruit
Fertile, detached, and always spent,
Falls but does not exhaust the root,
So all the poem is, can give,
Grows in me to become the song,
Made so and rooted by love.

Now there is time and Time is young.
O, in this single hour I live
All of myself and do not move.
I, the pursued, who madly ran,
Stand still, stand still, and stop the sun!

© <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/may-sarton>

Choosing Life

by Val Roberts

The phrase 'Seize life!' brings to mind Deuteronomy 30:19: 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life, that you and your offspring may live.'

We're freely given the gift of life and with it the freedom to choose between good and evil. The first brings life, the latter brings death. And there's a further choice – to choose life in all its fullness, promised by Jesus (John 10:10).

For me, choosing can be challenging – calling me to be intentional and proactive in how I live – to take responsibility for how I respond to what life brings.

When things are going well and there's much to celebrate, it's relatively easy for me to choose life – acknowledging God as the source of life and goodness. But when things aren't so great in my life or in others' – I'm tempted to retreat into a mentality of blame and demands and I'm no longer living the abundant life.

'Death' subtly starts to seep into my life.

At times, death also creeps into my life in the form of illness and loss. I find every form of death affects my being present to God, others, myself and the moment. (For me, 'being present' is a good definition of seizing life.) I find it harder to say 'yes' to life, when it would be easier not to.

Only through the contemplative life, have I been able to move through the challenges of choosing life when times are hard – embracing all of myself and all of life.

An episode of depression brought me to a desperate point in life. God led me to a Spiritual Director who started me on my contemplative path. There I journeyed into the hidden darkness and wounds within myself. I learned how to embrace all parts of myself and my past.

I couldn't do any of this until I began to experience God's unconditional love for me through meditating on Psalm 139 (the first exercise my Spiritual Director gave me). By putting my own name into the Psalm – what I knew in my head became healing heart knowledge.

Ironically, instead of trying to avoid what feels like death – I needed to fully experience those feelings (inviting God into them with me) in order to move into abundant life. This is the paradox of needing to die – in order to live.

Sometimes choosing life over death requires the tough choice of facing – in myself – what holds me back from God and others. In his book, *Seeing Beyond Depression*,

Sometimes choosing life over death requires the tough choice of facing – in myself – what holds me back from God and others.



Jean Vanier tells us, when we can descend into the darkness and get in touch with our deepest need to be loved, the wounds of our hearts become an invitation to live in relationship with God and others. With the healing of inner wounds, is the discovery of the repressed life within me.

Vanier acknowledges the struggle between being open and saying 'yes' to life, and being closed and saying 'no, it's too hard.' Saying yes – to both the beauty and the pain – will bring us into greater freedom.

My experience of transformation involves saying 'yes' more and more. I am helped to do this by contemplating on the humanity of Jesus – who also struggled to say yes at times in his earthly life. This, in turn, leads me to greater acceptance and understanding of my own humanity.

The full range of contemplative practices enable me to connect to my deeper self: body, mind, and spirit. Here I experience God in new ways. As I progress, I'm learning to express this fullness of life I discover within me. *Lectio* and *visio divina*, Ignatian prayer, centring prayer and silence help me connect more deeply with God.

Creative practices like collage, art, music, photography and writing, let me fully experience and express life and Spirit. Movement and body prayer in many forms including ecstatic dance, are currently my favourite physical and spiritual explorations and expressions for saying yes to life.

Living each moment as fully as I can and being as completely present as I'm able, takes the place of building the ego and allows me to seize life. From that place I'm then able to be a channel of God's life to others.

Blessing by Glynn Cardy

May blessings shower upon you
in this year ahead,
and may you recognize them.

May you be less lonely and aching
as you experience the cup of kindness
offered by other lonely and aching people.

May you breathe more freely, less fearfully,
as the destructive behaviour of others
is swept away by a tide of goodwill.

May you laugh more often,
find puddles to splash in,
and sing every day some.

May you know the gentle God
who goes by the name of hospitality
and be buoyed by Her embrace.

May the trickle of love you know grow
to become a cascading stream of hope
irrigating the courage in your soul.

And may you stand in the waterfall
of these and other blessings and say:
'It's good to be alive!'

Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual life and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that is alive. It is spiritual wonder.

Thomas Merton

Do You Recall?

do you recall
when your heart first leapt
first wept
first swept into heavenly swirls?

do you remember the day
finding beauty ablaze
amazed as you gazed on a luminous world?

is there membrance now
of the day of the call
the voice so small
was it there at all?

a moment fleeting
a meeting of mind and vapor
a caper of a capricious imagination?

or...perhaps...an invitation
heaven sent
for transformation

The Turtle by Chuang Tzu

Chuang Tzu with his bamboo pole was fishing in the Pu river. The prince of Chu sent two vice-chancellors with a formal document: We hereby appoint you prime minister.

Chuang Tzu held his bamboo pole still. Watching the Pu river, he said: 'I'm told there is a sacred tortoise offered and canonized three thousand years ago, venerated by the prince, wrapped in silk, in a precious shrine on an altar in the temple.

'What do you think? Is it better to give up one's life and leave a sacred shell as an object of cult in a cloud of incense for three thousand years, or to live as a plain turtle dragging its tail in the mud?'

'For the turtle', said the vice-chancellor, 'better to live and drag its tail in the mud!'

'Go home!' said Chuang Tzu. 'Leave me here to drag my tail in the mud.'

<http://www.osholeela.com/poetry/chuangtzu>





Experiencing the love

by Trish McBride

At a spiritual directors' training course in 1993, we were led on a guided meditation 'go to a special place and meet Jesus there'.

I've always loved waterfalls and feel extra delight when a rainbow shimmers in the spray. So, there I was in a place just like that, and Jesus came hopping across the rocks, to meet me, smiling happily.

On the way, he paused to collect the rainbow over his arm. He tenderly draped it round me like a sari and pressed a red dot to my forehead. Such exquisite awe!

I felt very loved. I was startled, but at a deep level I knew, I am cherished!

I was curious about Jesus' use of Hindu symbols, but at the time I didn't understand the significance. I painted a picture of the encounter – not that I was going to forget it!

Only years later did I discover the red dot, the bindi or tika, is a sign of marriage or receiving the third eye of wisdom.

In 2006, I visited the church of St Gregory of Nyssa in San Francisco. I was startled to see a huge mural of the marriage of Jesus and the Soul. It was very similar to my little painting, except this big one had a 'mother-in-law God' and no waterfall.

One day in 2009, during a hard patch, I saw a rainbow in the sky and heard Jesus remind me, 'Here is your sari'. That's when I wrote the poem.

Remember the Rainbow?

Do you remember
The day they said
Go to a special place
And meet Jesus there?

So I went where water fell
Cliff length to a bubbling pool
Stones for steps across the shallows
Sun and sparkle and in the spray
A rainbow

And waited
Standing on a rock
Expectant

You came smiling
Hopping across the rocks

Pleased to be there
With me

And on the way along
Gathered the rainbow
Over your arm

As I watched entranced
You draped it round me as sari
Beautiful shimmering silk
All the colours
And I was transformed

Then with total tenderness
From somewhere you produced
The red dot for my forehead
Only much later did I understand
What that meant.



Soul Food

by Heather Kelly

It was many years ago when I first found delight in the sight of rain drops caught in the bloom of a fully flowering rose. Glorious. In the reality that is today's village and hospital-care life, I'm still moved by the wonder of that glory. But more deeply, I find it's the roses in particular and the flowers and trees in general that give much needed restoration to my soul.

The compassion and advocacy of Pastoral Care costs – in physical, emotional, mental and spiritual energy.

My aging brain suggests, it may have been as long ago as the early 1980's, when I was first introduced to Matthew Fox's notion of 'Creation Orientated Spirituality'. Initially I found the concept radical, but it grew on me and stayed with me. So much so, that in a workshop situation I was able to declare it a passion.

Today I'd say my faith is neither fundamental nor liberal. I believe everyone follows their own faith journey and every journey is valid. On the occasions I have the privilege to speak to groups about faith, I try to affirm their faith. The exception is in formal 'study groups' or when I'm invited to preach – in those situations I dare to speak my truth.

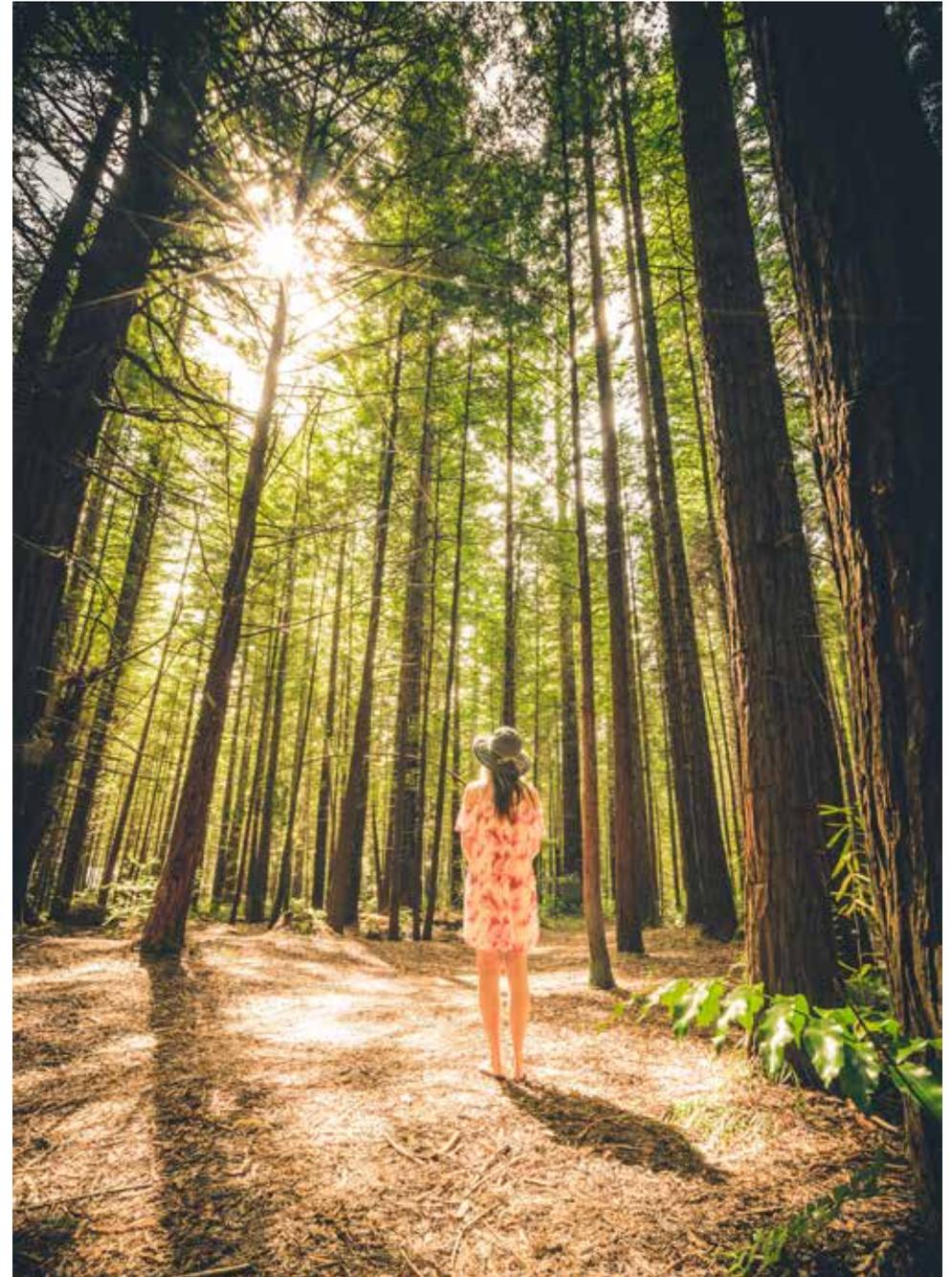
It's the things of the natural world that feed my spirit. I'm indebted to a *Touchstone* [Feb '18] contribution by David Hall, quoting a lesser known saying of Martin Luther, 'God writes the Gospel, not in the Bible alone, but also on trees and in the flowers and clouds and stars.'

I'm no longer able to walk on beaches or in the bush and this is a sadness for me, but fortunately I have a good long-term memory and an active imagination. Both can take me back – in my mind's eye – to earlier times. Similarly, my flower and vegetable pots – surrounded as they are by stones, shells, driftwood, pine cones and more. All these, including my writing, take me back and God speaks again.

I've heard it said, 'the sky is the billboard God uses to get our attention'. It's not a silly concept. So often the wide-open sky, night or day, is so beautiful – drawing me to that quiet, still place where I find God. The contemplative within me finds God in that stillness, in the beauty I see, in silence and in solitude.

And as I read through what I've written, I realise it was in aloneness that my eyes have been opened – and I have walked or sat with God.

Those times are lifegiving and sustain my living and my ministry. I acknowledge The Creator who gives me the sight of my eyes and the food for my soul.



© Meghan Maloney Photography

Death shall have no opinion

by Mike Riddell

Death shall have no opinion though on occasion may question	I never inhaled self-pity or gloom too high on life	my groin sliced by Death's sickle my sex excised
the false confidence of each breath - just asking	or too dumb to notice the tide's ebb	the foreplay of extinction a first caress
---	no matter - none gets out of here alive	---
sixty-five years is no viable defense against mortality	---	and yet I stand here among friends blood in my veins
achieving gold brings no podium more likely odium	I could retire fold my tent act my age	a crack of light at door's edge beckoning, beckoning
in the eyes of the casually young who live forever	put on my whites roll up on the green grow hair in each ear	---
---	sleep in my chair shuffle quietly drink weak tea	hand in hand I move forward to what must come
but we who remain might well consider our day's number	---	be it end or beginning be it start or finish I choose life
chewing our cud and cogitating the tag end of life	surrender beckons creeping silently bestowing senility	and Death shall have no opinion
---	as evening falls I decline the offer I choose life	

You are the exclamation mark!

by Kate Bariletti

Life is meant to be lived. Live it.
Love to your capacity every day, every moment.

In 2016 my spouse, the love of my life, died after a hemorrhagic stroke. My last words to her while conscious were 'I think you're having a stroke. Stick out your tongue.' Her last to me were gibberish.

In the six days it took for her body to shut down and her spirit to leave, I contemplated whether I had any regrets. No. Did she? Probably not.

We had initiated a freedom trip to the USA when the US Supreme Court and federal government acknowledged our union in July 2013. Our New Zealand civil union of 2005 gave us rights in NZ. But the US insisted on marriage, so we married in August 2013 and applied to the US for Jan's green card. I am a US citizen and had lived in Wanaka since 1996.

**The process of getting Jan's visa
took so much backbone, but our
love dragged us through.**

While waiting for the paperwork, which we knew could take a year, we decided to visit Vanuatu where it's illegal to be gay. So, we concocted a story that one of us was widowed and the other was divorced. Children are prized in the culture, so we answered questions of children and grandchildren by relating stories of our Wanaka friends.

I ended up helping the only school including special needs children by establishing individualized programmes and writing IEPs [Individual Education Plans]. There were no psychologists for testing or special needs teachers in the islands at that time. I dipped into my bag of educational tricks and an autistic girl was soon talking in sentences rather than echoing phrases.

The community so appreciated my work that returning their love was the easiest thing I've ever done. Because our stay was only three months, I trained one of the teachers to continue the programme once I left. Exclamation mark!

Jan and I did some house and pet sitting while on Efate. We treated local teachers, gardeners and house cleaners, to lunches and dinners on the lanai, flushing toilet and running water, which the English home owners would have hated if they'd known.

The process of getting Jan's visa took so much backbone, but our love dragged us through. On arrival at LAX, Immigration officials made our entry difficult when we answered, 'What is the nature of your relationship?' with 'We are married.' Exclamation mark!

The power of our love amazed the two of us. Historically, we'd individually managed hatred and discrimination for our sexual orientation with love and education. Now, together, we presented a respectful love that energized us and those around us. The immigration hiccup was over in less than an hour. Additionally, we gained compassion for immigrants to the USA.

We hit the road the first day of December 2014, on the journey of freedom and adventure we designed while waiting for the Green Card and visa.

My brother, 13 months my junior, was dying of a brain disease, so I flew to spend a week with him, then joined Jan in Phoenix for a warm winter, our first. While shopping for a motorhome, we met neighbours living in one they wanted to sell. They were grieving the death of a family member.

Jan stepped in to dog sit, enabling them to join their family. Her love opened the door for us to buy their motorhome when they dropped their asking price by \$25,000.

We headed north to visit my brother and then volunteer as camp hosts for the northern summer of 2015 in the Idaho mountains. My brother died just after we took up our position. Nevertheless, that summer on the edge of Petti Lake left us satisfied – and our campers smiling. We encountered deer, foxes and squirrels, who were tamed by Jan.

Across the country we drove to winter in Fort Myers in Florida, where we found an old friend we'd met in Alaska in 1996. Again, we looked after dogs and people in need. Ultimately, we rescued a dog that had lived in a 'no kill' shelter for 7 months. He had behaviour issues, but we had behaviour management skills.

That winter I smiled at every being I encountered, spreading love.

Exclamation mark!

We arrived at our next volunteer position on North Carolina's outer banks on the 5th April 2016 with our dog, Charlie, who loved living in the RV and helping with maintenance and socializing.

Rangers and other volunteers became our friends. Jan gave expertise in research. I shared my coaching skills with the rangers. We loved the environment, the people and the role of helping visitors appreciate the unique seashore and lighthouse accessible only by boat. Because we were in the States, I was able to be with my father as he died the first of July.

Our life at the point of Jan's stroke was one of love. My biggest complaint was the mosquitoes.

We had connected spiritually and emotionally with a magnificent natural area and generous people. On 27 July, 2016, we watched an electric storm before going to sleep. Jan awoke with her right side paralysed and quickly lost her language and then consciousness. According to her wishes, I refused intubation and treatment that could have seen her alive but comatose in a nursing home.

Doctors and social workers commented on my courage. I called it love.

As I stroked Jan's head, held her hand and encouraged her to move on, I reviewed all the choices we had made since learning she was eligible for a Green Card based on our relationship.

We'd always travelled, but this trip affirmed us, gave us our freedom, and allowed me to repeatedly visit my brother and my father before their deaths.

Jan had spent the last week of her life climbing the lighthouse she loved. She told me she loved the environment so much she could live there. Instead she died and lives in the sea and the wind of the coast.

So many of the people we had met came forward to support us as she was dying. I was invited to stay at the Visitor Center as long as I needed and to work as much or as little as I wished. As it turned out, they had to evacuate the National Seashore when Hurricane Matthew arrived in early October.

I jumped up to live some more – and grabbed my exclamation mark! And my dog.

As I couldn't drive the motorhome, friends from Florida arranged for strangers to drive it back to our RV pad in Ft Myers. I needed a base to reorganize my life. Within weeks of Jan's death, I outran a major hurricane, I was narrowly missed by a tornado and a dog ripped a 4-inch flap of skin away from my leg.

When hospital staff didn't want to honour the legality of our marriage and provide me her medical record, I battled and won. Exclamation mark!

Back in New Zealand, Wanaka friends raised money through crowd funding for me to return with Jan's ashes for a ceremony. That trip confirmed my desire to return to Wanaka and make a life alone.

I feel the emptiness of life without Jan. I also know enormous love. I still replay memories of our two and a half years of life on the road. The best years of our life together.

That's how we should all leave this earth. Living the best we ever lived. No regrets. Only exclamation marks!

Now, please excuse me. I must go cheer on my friends who are participating in the Wanaka Challenge triathlon today! They are exclamation marks, too!

**I jumped up to live some more
– and grabbed my exclamation
mark! And my dog.**

A Map for Living by Martin de Jong

If you play your cards too close to your chest
You can't see what you're holding.
You have the key,
Unlock the mystery.
Go fly a kite,
Get on your bike.
Fill up with oil,
Light the burner.
Telescope your vision,
Realise it sooner.
And if you can't read the music ...
Dance to it instead.

Ecclesiastes 1

by Holly Walton

'Meaningless, meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.'

The new day starts with the sound of the alarm. I stumble through cushions and excess blankets in the darkness and switch it off. Maybe the sun will poke through the clouds today. Maybe not.

I make tea for my sleeping girls and my groggy husband and switch on the coffee machine for myself. And so another day begins. A cycle of work, school, food, cleaning, homework, housework. And back to bed to ready myself to repeat the whole cycle again tomorrow.

What for? What do we do it all for? The working and the studying and the building and the striving day after day after year after year. From generation to generation. What is it all for?

**I return to my breath. Feel the air
fill my lungs, giving me life.**

All things are wearisome, more than one can say.

That wearisome cycle is hypnotic. It is so easy to get caught up in the endless cycle that everything becomes a meaningless, boring blur.

The sun rises and the sun sets. There was day and there was night. I breathe in and I breathe out. The winds blow from the North to the South and around to the North again. Around and around.

A baby is born and a mother dies.

Ashes are buried in the dust from which they come.

And the earth continues to turn and the streams continue to flow to the sea. And the sea is never filled but the waves keep pounding the shore. And the shells speak of mysterious lands and the seagulls cry about perspectives we cannot gain.

Trees turn red and then skeletal and then they start to bud and become green.

I breathe in. I breathe out. My heart beats in my chest.

And it becomes wearisome this cycle of birthing and breathing and being and dying. Until I scream MEANINGLESS!
Utterly meaningless.

I return to my breath. Feel the air fill my lungs, giving me life.

I listen to the sound of my family.

It's the same as always, and yet special today. Right now.

And the sun may be setting. Again. But there is dinner to be shared with my precious family. And the sun will rise tomorrow whether I can see it through the clouds, or not.

And there is safety in the sameness.

And there is mystery in the cycle.

With heartfelt, wordless praise, I head downstairs for dinner. Amen.



Tell me the old, old story rewritten

by Norman Wilkins

Tell us the old, old story
That hope will never die
That good will be our future
As we strive to reach the sky

Tell us that story simply
So we can pass it on
We all will share one future
All people under one Sun

*Tell us the old, old story,
tell us the old, old story,
tell us the old, old story,
So hope shall never die*

Tell us the story often,
For we have need of more
Knowing of those who suffer
From hunger and from war,

Tell us the story often
For life for us is safe
But hope is what is needed
For widow, maimed and waif

Refrain

Tell us the story clearly
We need to see the truth
Amongst the strident voices
Denying logic and proof

Let us value our science
For it's God's way to go
There is no good in lying
To lies our faith says 'No!'

Refrain

Tell us the story gently
Like the whisper of a breeze
The energy of sunlight
A balanced Earth at ease

Tell us the story gently
So hope can fill our soul
To save all life on Earth
Our climate calm and cool

Refrain

Tell us the story Siri
The future we may glimpse
When all may be computers
Artificial intelligence

Tell us the robot story
And give us hope that we
May have God's real wisdom
So humans can stay free

Refrain

Gift

by Ana Lisa de Jong

It is my job as a poet seer,
as one who feels before I see
to find the words, even if it hurts.

To carry the light into dark corners.
To bring the word that turns the heart,
the word that speaks into the barren centre

that it might spring to life.

We are each given life
to turn it from more than a spark,
to draw from it a forest fire.

All of us, are given the means to
grow the gifts we have received.
And they are not for us, never for us;

but we are blessed through their practice.

What brings life to others
charges us at our own core.

We live in the stream,
when we are living who we truly are.

It is my job to follow my unravelling pen.
Just as its yours to draw the glory that you see,
to move heaven and earth in prayer

or lay out a table for your friends,
and your enemies.

To turn compassion into action,
to bandage up and heal.
To express the love that is your reason,
in the way you are designed.

We are each of us His
and He becomes revealed to the extent that
we express His heart through our gifts.

Yes, it is my job, even if it hurts
to faithfully draw images with my words.
To bring to birth again and again the

new thing He wants to do.

We have a vocation,
each a calling and to find it is to
follow the stream to the source.

To put out our clay jars
and watch them fill
that we might pour them out
into the world.



The Great Cry

by Nikos Kazantzakis (1885-1957)

Blowing through heaven and earth, and in our hearts and the heart of every living thing, is a gigantic breath - a great Cry - which we call God. Plant life wished to continue its motionless sleep next to stagnant waters, but the Cry leaped up within it and violently shook its roots:

'Away, let go of the earth, walk!'

Had the tree been able to think and judge, it would have cried, 'I don't want to. What are you urging me to do? You are demanding the impossible!'

But the Cry, without pity, kept shaking its roots and shouting, 'Away, let go of the earth, walk!'

It shouted in this way for thousands of eons, and lo! as a result of desire and struggle, life escaped the motionless tree and was liberated.

Animals appeared - worms - making themselves at home in water and mud. 'We're just fine here,' they said. 'We have peace and security; we're not budging!'

But the terrible Cry hammered itself pitilessly into their loins. 'Leave the mud, stand up, give birth to your betters!'

'We don't want to! We can't!'

'You can't, but I can. Stand up!'

And lo! after thousands of eons, man emerged, trembling on his still unsolid legs.

The human being is a centaur, his equine hoofs are planted in the ground, but his body from breast to head is worked on and tormented by the merciless Cry. He has been fighting, again for thousands of eons, to draw himself, like a sword, out of his animalistic scabbard. He is also fighting - this is his new struggle - to draw himself out of his human scabbard.

Man calls in despair, 'Where can I go? I have reached the pinnacle, beyond is the abyss.' And the Cry answers, 'I am beyond. Stand up!'

from *Report to Greco* originally published 1961.

To live is Christ

by Paul the Apostle

I want you to know, beloved, what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel. So, it's become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I've been put here for the defense of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know – through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ – this will turn out for my deliverance. It's my eager expectation and hope that I won't be put to shame in any way, but by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.

If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I don't know which I prefer. I'm hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I'm convinced of this, I know I'll remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. So, whether I come to see you or am absent and hear about you, I'll know you're standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents.

Paraphrased from Philippians 1, NRSV

Psalm 119:80 Help me to love your every wish

by Anna Johnstone

Heart-touching words
full of intimate longing
desire, willingness
to do anything
everything
for the Beloved
To know the
mind of God

To find delight
in answering
the large
the small

You smile, asking
what I think
small wishes of yours
might be

I've honestly no idea

They could be stuff
I'd have to leave in
the too-hard basket
or maybe as easy as
enjoying the cat next door
stretched out in the sun

You say you'd never wish for
anything above my pay scale
that would be unfair and
you're never that

You smile again and
a laugh bubbles up
inside me
You want me to explore this
don't you?

Your eyes are kind, clear
as you wait for me
to go on

This is the next step
Can I call it a step?

It's not some big adventure
rushing off to do great things
for the Kingdom
but a drawing closer to
the Heart of the universe
walking close to your side
so that the sound of
your breathing
the music of your thinking
becomes my own

The hugeness of it
wraps me in silence

Sometimes silence is the
most powerful speech
I have

Words run away to
the borders of my mind
leaving hallowed ground
where my heart kneels
in love

This powerful emptiness
is full of meaning
I can only feel

Presence
is the name
I now know



© Linda Tanoa'i

MOEMOEA New Zealand Born Dreams THREE GENERATIONS OF DREAMS

By Moko Che, Dad Feleti & Papa Mua

TOLU TUPULAGA/3RD GENERATION

Fast flying shooting star
changes through the past
goes onto the future
never stops forever, Alofa.

[Che'den Sofi AhYek Strickson-Pua

6 years old

Grandson & Son]

LUA TUPULAGA/2ND GENERATION

With these eyes I have seen the past
with this mind I see the future
with these feet I create stability
with these hands I create change.

[Feleti Sofi Strickson-Pua

27 years old

Father & Son]

TASITUPULAGA/1ST GENERATION

Dreams open the door
freeing our searching spirit
allowing us to fulfill
a life of Alofa.

[Muamua Sofi Strickson-Pua

54 years old

Grandfather, Papa & Father]

Books and Music

Point Vierge

Thomas Merton's Journey in Song

by Alana Levandoski and James Finley

<https://www.alanalevandoski.com/>

Plus, companion booklet with Alana and James' engaging conversations on the journey.

Reviewed by Diane Gilliam-Weeks

It gives me great pleasure to recommend this beautiful album to you created by my prophetic friend, Alana Levandoski and James Findley. I'm in good company, Richard Rohr calls it 'Profound, beautiful and for those who are ready, game changing and life changing!' Cynthia Bourgeault says, '*Point Vierge* is a masterpiece both in the spiritual and artistic arenas.'

Merton wrote in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, about *le point vierge*, 'I cannot translate it...At the center of our being is a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lies, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us. It is so to speak His name written in us, as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship. It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven. It is in everybody, and if we could see it, we would see these billions of points of light coming together in the face and blaze of a sun that would make all the darkness and cruelty of life vanish completely...I have no program for this seeing. It is only given. But the gate of heaven is everywhere.'

The Last Walk by Anna Johnstone

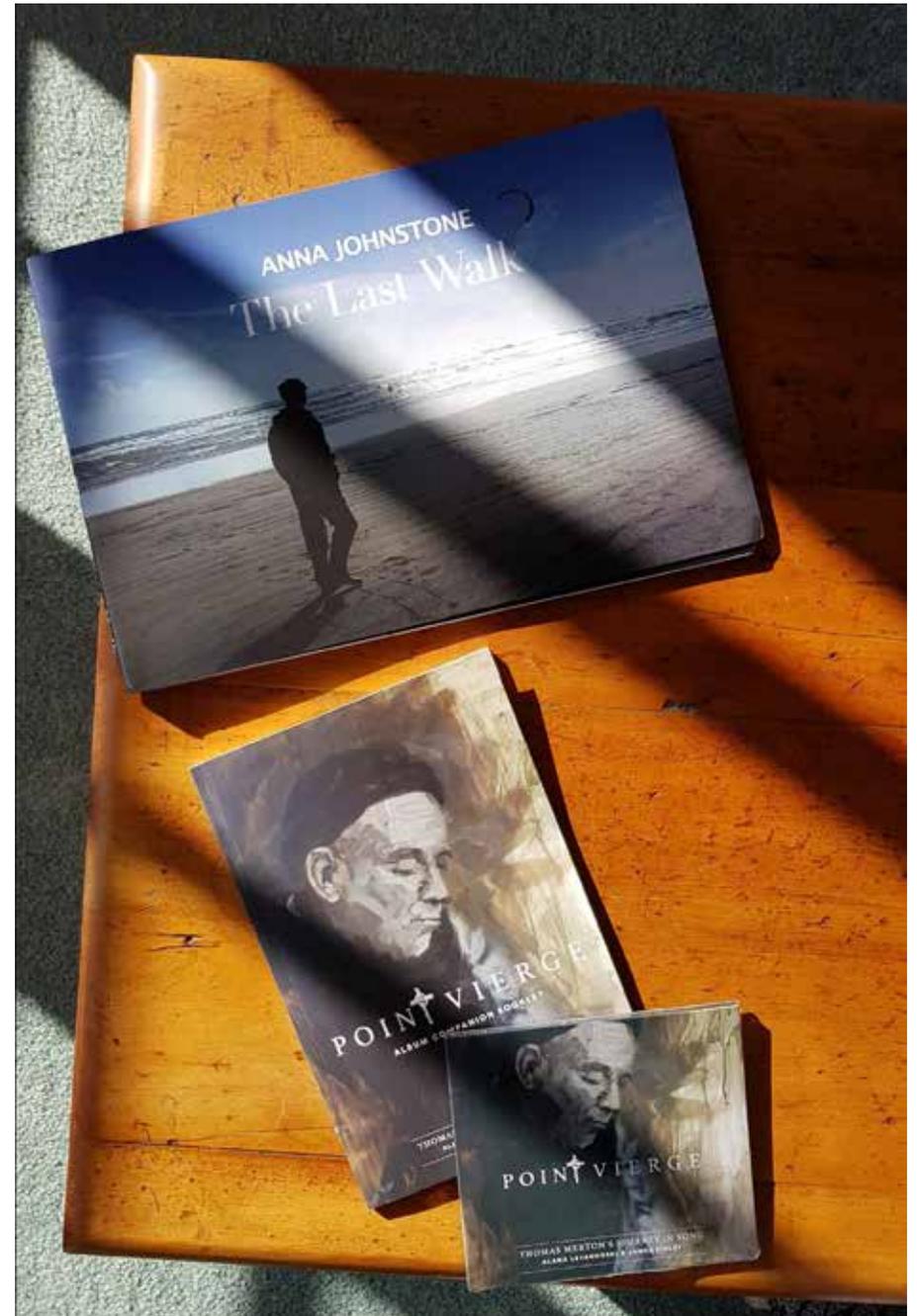
eBook PDF and A4 Landscape printed book

<https://www.annajohnstone.com>

Reviewed by Diane Gilliam-Weeks

I loved getting my hard copy of *The Last Walk*! It looks so good on the coffee table! The words and images in this timely volume certainly live up to their promise – from an accomplished Christian poet with a deep and passionate faith in the unfailing love of God. What a gift for anyone who seeks to live well and to die well. Anna's poems – as always – reveal the footprints of spiritual maturity. Every reader will fully understand why I find Anna's poetry irresistible for the pages of *Refresh*!

Your words give
'grace to live through darkness
peace to quell fear in fainting hearts
hope to face the unknown
of every tomorrow'



© Diane Gilliam-Weeks

The Choice

By Edith Eger (published by Rider: London, 2017)

Reviewed by Sue Pickering

I quote directly from the inside front cover of this remarkable book: 'In 1944, sixteen-year-old Edith Eger was sent to Auschwitz. There she endured unimaginable experiences, including being made to dance for Joseph Mengele...' Over the next few months, Edith's bravery helped her sister survive and led her bunkmates to rescue her during a death march. When their camp was liberated, Edith was pulled from a pile of bodies, barely alive.

Today she's an internationally acclaimed psychologist whose patients include abuse survivors and soldiers suffering PTSD. Eger explains how many of us live within a mind that's become a prison and shows us how 'once we confront our suffering, we can choose freedom.'

Reading this book was like a roller coaster propelling me painfully down to the depths of human suffering and cruelty, and then up again to the truly awe-inspiring courage and kindness of which the human spirit is capable – even in the direst circumstances.

While her suffering doesn't end with release from Auschwitz, we see how 'choosing life' was embedded in all her decisions – even those which were personally costly.

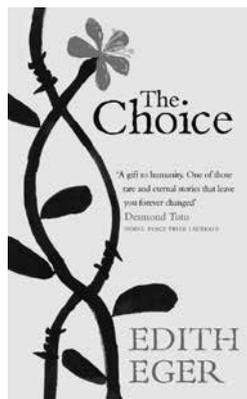
We might expect to find judgement in such a memoir – instead we see deep compassion, searing honesty and clarity of purpose – revealing the capacity within each of us to choose to live or to die. [As Edith did between eating a blade of grass or eating flesh] Or as someone who's depressed chooses to get out of bed in the morning.

Eger's sister, Magda, lost her faith. As did many others. 'We can't believe in a God who would let this happen,' they'd say.

But Edith also chose her way of seeing God. 'I understand what they mean', she says, 'and yet I've never found it difficult to see it isn't God who's killing people in gas chambers, in ditches, on cliff sides, on 186 white stairs. God doesn't run the death camps. People do. But here's the horror again and I don't want to indulge it.'

'I picture God like a dancing child. Sprightly and innocent and *curious*. And I must be like that, if I'm to be close to God now. I want to keep alive the part of me that feels wonder, that *wonders*, until the very end.'

For her clients profoundly 'stuck' in their trauma or grief, Edith's ability to seize life and hope in the face of depression or death is a real gift. Through her powerful and engaging words, this gift is shared – so we may reconsider our own 'stuckness' and our choices to live a freer, more forgiving life.



SGM News

Jane Wilkinson is the new Convenor of the Spiritual Growth Ministries Board. Jane lives in Wellington offering Spiritual Direction and Supervision with particular care for those in pastoral ministry. She's been a long-term member of SGM workgroup and highly recommends its honest, relational contemplative approach. Additionally, she likes people, cats, op-shops, movies and walking.

Behold Initiative update

Not long after the Summer *Refresh* went to the printer, we had the pleasure to appoint Kerryn and Peter Christensen to share the position of Coordinator of the Behold Initiative. Kerryn will be mainly involved in planning, logistics, design and delivery of workshops and Peter in content development. Both trained as Spiritual Directors with SGM and applied their training at *The Well* counselling and missionary care centre in Chiang Mai, Thailand where they ran regular retreats.

SGM particularly wants to thank Sue Pickering for spearheading the Behold Initiative on our behalf.

Behold will enable SGM to work strategically throughout New Zealand to make the riches of our resources and experience in the contemplative life more widely available. We're convinced appropriately designed opportunities for the wider community to engage in Christian contemplative prayer will draw more people into a deeper awareness of their nature as beloved of God, enable personal transformation and spiritual growth, and foster a desire to reach out to others in justice and service. Behold events are geared to the general public, and will open up topics relevant to Kiwi spirituality as a response to the spiritual hunger of 21st century people. We hope to encourage people through these 'taster' events to explore a deepening sense of connection with themselves, the world and the sacred.

Why would people be interested?

People who are spiritually hungry may be drawn to meditation or silent prayer and often turn first to eastern religions, unaware there is a rich tradition of 'listening' or 'contemplative' prayer within the Christian faith.

How will a Behold event be different to a normal SGM retreat day?

Behold is pitched at those unfamiliar with Christian spirituality and/or Christianity at all. As well, many within the Christian faith may never have heard of contemplative prayer or may link it to eastern practices which seek to empty the mind – whereas Christian forms focus on opening intentionally to God's presence within us.

SDFP Special Projects relating to Spiritual Direction on the web!

To access: <http://www.sgm.org.nz/spiritual-direction-special-interest-projects.html>
Donations to the work of SGM can now be made on our website
<https://www.sgm.org.nz> or directly to our account 03 0166 0198782 00.

The Last Word

My husband and I recently read an interesting book called *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science* written by 'leading evangelical geneticist Dennis Venema, and popular New Testament scholar, Scot McKnight'. They write for the unfortunate young Christian who wants to become a scientist but fears to lose their faith. Now we've come to believe that science is just another way to look at what God is doing, so we were curious to read up on some up to the minute genetic discoveries. (We didn't need to be convinced about the etiology of the first and second creations stories in the book of Genesis.)

We discovered there are about 20,000 genes in the human genome, and scientists are discovering more every day through bioinformatics and experiments in the lab. While we know what a lot of genes do, there are still a lot of genes whose functions we don't yet know or fully understand.

Naturally my mystical mind took hold of this and asked, what if God was functioning as/sustaining LIFE inside the genomes of all creatures? Wouldn't this point to the inescapability of our connectedness to God and to one another? What if consciousness of the presence of God was part of human evolution – what amazing joy for God!

Blessings
Diane [dianegw@actrix.co.nz]

Summer 2019 Refresh theme 'Cosmos'

Deadline Sept 28, 2018

The third article in this present edition, *Conscious cosmos and the mechanics of life* by Professor Jeffery Tallon is the jumping off point for *Refresh's* summer theme – 'Cosmos'. How do physicists and philosophers who believe in God harmonise the discoveries of cosmology with the doctrine of creation and their understanding of the nature of God? Some say the very argument for God is the existence of the universe. Does cosmology enhance or erode your belief in God? What exciting and inspiring insights have you had as you danced with God through the universe as we now know it to be?

Guidelines for writers – please, please, please!

keep contributions to fewer than 2000 words

use single quotation marks

be conversational in style

use conjunctions wherever possible

use endnotes instead of footnotes

use inclusive language wherever possible

ensure any images you send are larger than 2MB.



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Spring

by Els van den Beuken

Yesterday I had spring
I came home in such an excited mood
With my drawing of a waterlily
Celebrating the new growth I felt inside

Today it seems harder
Having spent my morning with SPELD teachers
Who are having conversations,
connecting with each other about what they are doing
My growth seems so futile
And I just feel the weight of all the years I have 'lost'

But as I reflect on that last statement
I feel God is trying to say something:
'Don't consider those years lost.
Perspective is everything, you know
All those years in darkness have taught you
To believe in the possibility of your own wonderful spring'.

And as I look up from some of my sad words
I see the beauty of sunshine on a green covered hill
I see the bright yellow of a kowhai, the red of a rhododendron
Spring is right before me
God is inviting me to shift my glance
And invest in the positive

Contributors

Marilyn Wilkinson is a Kapiti Coast grandma who, with husband Peter Dallas, is learning to cope with the challenges and gifts which come with older age. Walking in the bush, swimming in and walking by the sea, delving into the garden, creating with wool and words – and reading authors who stretch her, are all blessings she savours.

Maggie Quinlan is a part-time GP and Pastoral Care Coordinator at Papakura Wesleyan Church. She has two children and three grandchildren. She enjoys the outdoors, looking after her menagerie of animals, dancing, singing, mosaicing, poetry writing and photography.

Jeff Tallon is Professor of Physics at Victoria University of Wellington. He's internationally known for his research and discoveries in superconductivity. Jeff has been a Visiting Professor at Cambridge University, a Visiting Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge and was awarded the inaugural Prime Minister's Science Prize. Jeff regularly speaks, lectures and writes on the fertile relationship between science and faith.

Martin de Jong is a writer, journalist and thinker who lives on the banks of Te Awa Kairangi (Hutt River) near Wellington. He is married with three wonderful daughters and worships at Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church at Waiwhetu.

Val Chapman loves retirement with her husband, daughter and family who live in their family home. She's a spiritual director, holds retreats, and is very involved in pastoral ministry. She is writing her first book *Sacrifice, the Journey to Joy*.

Val Roberts is a Spiritual Director living with her husband on the Kapiti Coast. She enjoys being involved with L'Arche Kapiti (a community of adults with and without disabilities), being creative, connecting to nature, encouraging and journeying with others. She's looking forward to a new stage of life, becoming a grandparent this year.

Glynn Cardy is the Minister of the St Luke's Presbyterian Church in Remuera. He is married to Stephanie, and they have four children. Glynn enjoys coffee, tramping, crime fiction, and cycling.

Trish McBride is retired, enjoys reading, learning, her garden, walking and quilting. Those are all secondary to friends and her family, which includes 21 grandchildren. And just being, and being available.

Heather Kelly is one of the younger residents living independently in an Invercargill Retirement Village. Heather seeks to live a lifestyle of pastoral care with those whose lives touch hers, she 'plays with words' for refreshment and is energised in the process.

Mike Riddell is a novelist, playwright, and screenwriter living peacefully in a small enclave of the Waikato. A former Baptist minister turned Catholic layman, he enjoys cooking, reading, silence and the company of friends.

Kate Bariletti is a writer, poet and education consultant who lives in Wanaka. She considers herself spiritual but not religious. Kate enjoys the growth that travel, children, and deep philosophical conversation bring her.

Holly Walton lives in Waiake, Auckland with her husband, 3 daughters and peculiar cat, Rigsby. She is a parish administrator and spiritual director-in-training. She loves writing, walking, birds and good coffee.

Norman Wilkins is a retired Presbyterian Minister whose past parishes were Kaitiaki Union, St. George's/Iona and Kapiti Uniting. He presently attends St. Andrew's on the Terrace and one of his interests is promoting the adoption of the Living Wage in the Wellington area. He also enjoys doing maintenance work to raise money for the restoration of St. Andrew's heritage organ.

Ana Lisa de Jong is a poet and Chaplaincy Administrator for NZDF. She lives in the beautiful North West of Auckland on the verge of the countryside, where she draws inspiration from the day's passage and the turning seasons. Author of the 'Poetry for the Soul' book series, her fourth book of poetry 'Heart Psalms' is on its way to print. Ana Lisa writes at livingtreepoetry.com.

Mua Strickson-Pua is Presbyterian Ngati Hamoa Saina Cantonese Irish French Gafa Whakapapa poet educator, sponsored by Linda Strickson-Pua and currently studying under our Mokopunas who are concerned that old people may miss out in Poto wisdom – plus Interim Moderator for St Pauls Presbyterian Waiheke Island.

Sue Pickering continues to value the contemplative path even if sleep often interrupts the practice! Winding down roles and responsibilities is still a work in progress as age affects energy and new pathways call. Who would walk this journey without the support of the Blessed Trinity?

Els van den Beuken is a wife, mother, house maker and part time early childhood teacher living in Wellington. Always having had a keen interest in the outdoors and nature, she has in more recent years felt the opportunity to connect deeper with what inspires her, and to explore more creative ways of self-expression, including writing some poetry. She feels she's on a journey from being a more 'dutiful' Christian to one with a growing inner awareness of Christ's truth.

Anna Johnstone, living on Auckland's North Shore with her lovely man, Kerry, part of the Albany Presbyterian Church family and a keen Hospice Shop volunteer, can hardly believe that life, at this age, keeps getting better and better as the Trinity encourage us out of the corners and into the dance. annajohnstone.com