

Simple Gift

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
'Tis the gift to come down where I ought to be;
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
'Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed;
to turn, turn, will be my delight.
Till by turning, turning we come round right.
-Elder Joseph Brackett (May 6, 1797 - July 4, 1882)*

This hymn has been on my mind lately. I used to hate it. Not, the lyrics, which I usually didn't hear, but the tune. (If you're not familiar with it, you can listen [here](#).) The instrumental version of that tune was on endless repeat in the showroom of Shaker Workshops, the furniture store where I worked as a teenager. I loved the furniture, but grew to hate the song.

It's since grown on me.

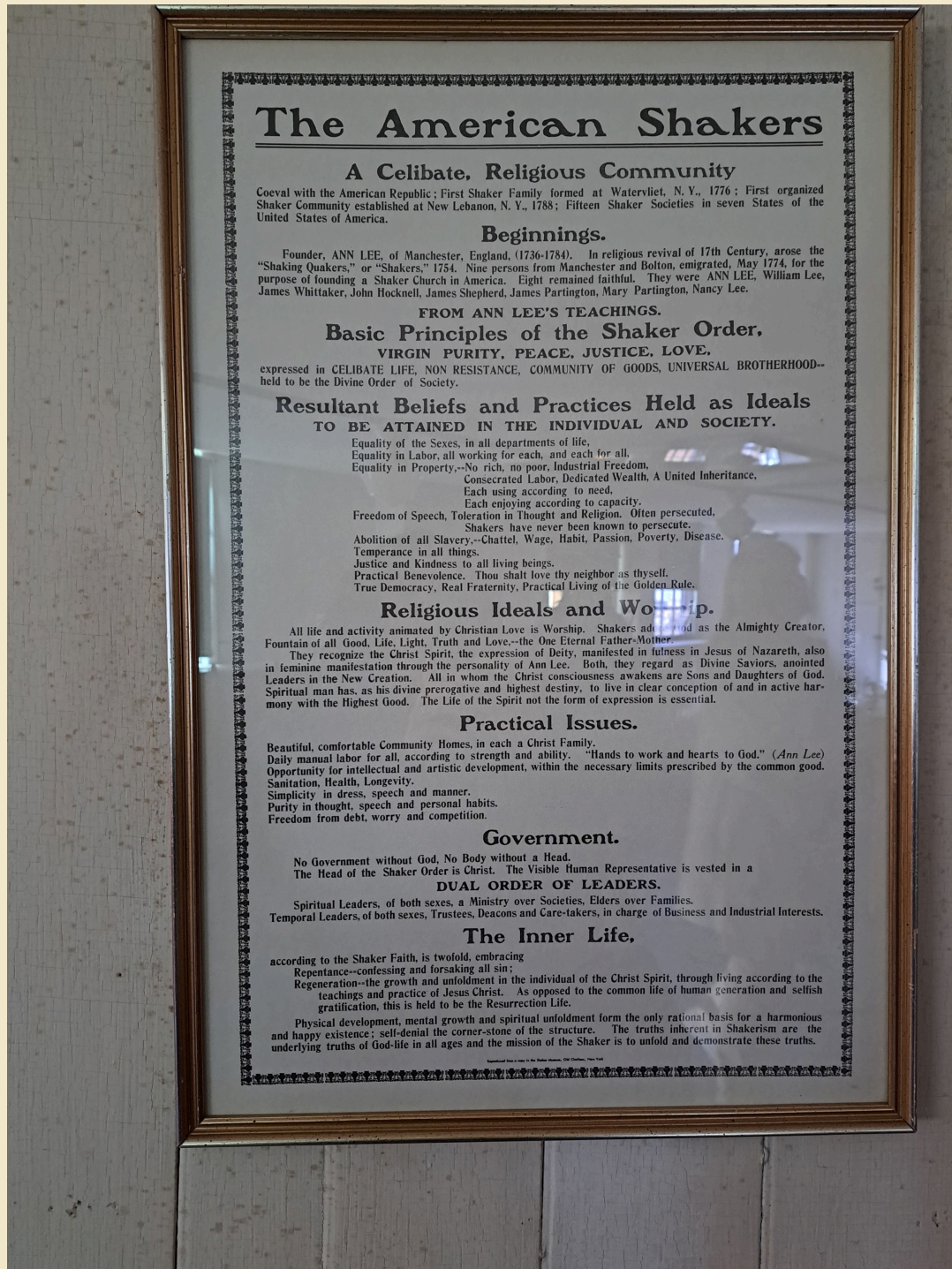
Several weekends ago my husband Tom and I stayed at a Bed & Breakfast near New Hampshire's scenic Lakes Region. We were a few weeks past peak foliage season, but it was still gorgeous. And less crowded, since most of the tourists were gone.



Saturday was our only full day, and we spent it visiting Shaker Village in Canterbury, NH. I'd learned a bit about the Shakers during my months working at Shaker Workshops. Not only did I love the simple functionality and fine craftsmanship of their furniture, I also appreciated their values and beliefs.

The Shakers were more egalitarian in their understanding of gender roles than was common for their time. Women and men had equal leadership

roles in the community. Think about that: in the late 1700s, women and men were both valued as leaders, and the community was structured to ensure that equality. The work necessary for keeping the community functioning did follow 'traditional' gender roles for that time, though that was more a side effect of cultural assumptions that no one thought to question than a commitment to the belief that men and women must stay in their respective spheres.



The American Shakers

A Celibate, Religious Community

Coeval with the American Republic; First Shaker Family formed at Watervliet, N. Y., 1776; First organized Shaker Community established at New Lebanon, N. Y., 1788; Fifteen Shaker Societies in seven States of the United States of America.

Beginnings.

Founder, ANN LEE, of Manchester, England, (1736-1784). In religious revival of 17th Century, arose the "Shaking Quakers," or "Shakers," 1754. Nine persons from Manchester and Bolton, emigrated, May 1774, for the purpose of founding a Shaker Church in America. Eight remained faithful. They were ANN LEE, William Lee, James Whittaker, John Hocknell, James Shepherd, James Partington, Mary Partington, Nancy Lee.

FROM ANN LEE'S TEACHINGS.

Basic Principles of the Shaker Order,

VIRGIN PURITY, PEACE, JUSTICE, LOVE.

expressed in CELIBATE LIFE, NON RESISTANCE, COMMUNITY OF GOODS, UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD--held to be the Divine Order of Society.

Resultant Beliefs and Practices Held as Ideals TO BE ATTAINED IN THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY.

Equality of the Sexes, in all departments of life.
 Equality in Labor, all working for each, and each for all.
 Equality in Property.--No rich, no poor, Industrial Freedom,
 Consecrated Labor, Dedicated Wealth, A United Inheritance,
 Each using according to need,
 Each enjoying according to capacity.
 Freedom of Speech, Toleration in Thought and Religion. Often persecuted,
 Shakers have never been known to persecute.
 Abolition of all Slavery.--Chattel, Wage, Habit, Passion, Poverty, Disease.
 Temperance in all things.
 Justice and Kindness to all living beings.
 Practical Benevolence. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.
 True Democracy, Real Fraternity, Practical Living of the Golden Rule.

Religious Ideals and Worship.

All life and activity animated by Christian Love is Worship. Shakers adore God as the Almighty Creator, Fountain of all Good, Life, Light, Truth and Love.--the One Eternal Father-Mother.
 They recognize the Christ Spirit, the expression of Deity, manifested in Jesus of Nazareth, also in feminine manifestation through the personality of Ann Lee. Both, they regard as Divine Saviors, anointed Leaders in the New Creation. All in whom the Christ consciousness awakens are Sons and Daughters of God. Spiritual man has, as his divine prerogative and highest destiny, to live in clear conception of and in active harmony with the Highest Good. The Life of the Spirit not the form of expression is essential.

Practical Issues.

Beautiful, comfortable Community Homes, in each a Christ Family.
 Daily manual labor for all, according to strength and ability. "Hands to work and hearts to God." (Ann Lee)
 Opportunity for intellectual and artistic development, within the necessary limits prescribed by the common good.
 Sanitation, Health, Longevity.
 Simplicity in dress, speech and manner.
 Purity in thought, speech and personal habits.
 Freedom from debt, worry and competition.

Government.

No Government without God, No Body without a Head.
 The Head of the Shaker Order is Christ. The Visible Human Representative is vested in a
DUAL ORDER OF LEADERS.
 Spiritual Leaders, of both sexes, a Ministry over Societies, Elders over Families.
 Temporal Leaders, of both sexes, Trustees, Deacons and Care-takers, in charge of Business and Industrial Interests.

The Inner Life,

according to the Shaker Faith, is twofold, embracing
 Repentance--confessing and forsaking all sin;
 Regeneration--the growth and unfolding in the individual of the Christ Spirit, through living according to the teachings and practice of Jesus Christ. As opposed to the common life of human generation and selfish gratification, this is held to be the Resurrection Life.
 Physical development, mental growth and spiritual unfolding form the only rational basis for a harmonious and happy existence; self-denial the corner-stone of the structure. The truths inherent in Shakerism are the underlying truths of God-life in all ages and the mission of the Shaker is to unfold and demonstrate these truths.

As you can see, they specifically called out that spiritual leaders and temporal leaders were to be represented by both sexes, and for equality of the sexes "in all departments of life." And while they strove for simplicity, that shouldn't be confused with self-denial. They believed in "each using according to need, each enjoying according to capacity," and "opportunity for intellectual and artistic development, within the necessary limits prescribed by the common good." That cute little tune for *Simple Gift* was actually a fairly energetic dance song that probably included stomping and, definitely, turning.

Of course, it's no surprise that the Shakers didn't last. They were a celibate community, meaning absolutely no sex, not even for procreation. For a hundred and fifty years they recruited adults willing to join the community and adopted orphans, raising them until they were of an age to decide if they wanted to stay and commit to the Shaker life or use the skills and education they received to make their own way in the world (with the Shakers' blessings and good wishes). Most stayed. That changed as industrialization grew and there began to be more opportunities outside the community. The Shaker population dropped considerably by the early 1900s. The last Shakers living in Canterbury, NH died in the early 1990s. I believe there are still a few living in a community in Maine.

This is all on my mind right now because I'm in the process of simplifying my life. My family is moving out of our home next month, and we're in the process of sorting through our things and deciding what we're going to bring with us and what we're going to trash or donate. And it's not just about possessions. A lot of those "things" represent priorities. I'm surrounded by items that demand my time and attention, and I don't have enough of that to go around. So as I look at each item, I also am considering what it represents, and if that's something I want to bring with me to my new life.

Needless to say, packing is going slowly.

It's a worthwhile question, though. My life as I've been living it for the past few years hasn't been working, and my husband and I have decided that now's the time to shake things up and make some major changes. So we are. And it's terrifying. And exhilarating. And stressful.

And in those moments when I'm beginning to lose my mind, I think back to the peace of Shaker Village in Canterbury, NH, and remind myself that life is only as complicated as I let it be. I want to use according to need, and, just as importantly, enjoy according to capacity. Like many of us, I think I've managed to reverse those two. And using according to capacity and enjoying only according to need isn't sustainable or even particularly pleasant.

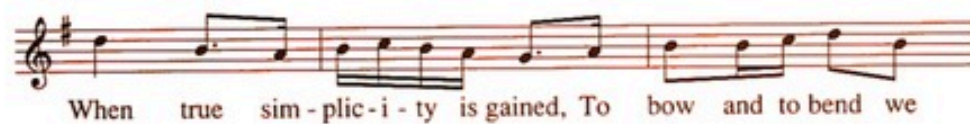
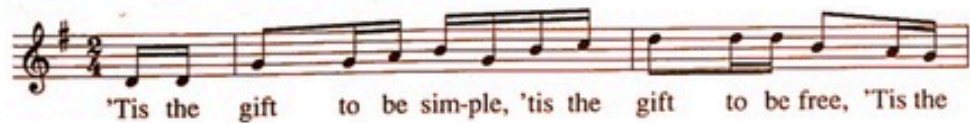
As we enter the holidays, I wish you simple gifts, freedom, and the valley of love and delight.





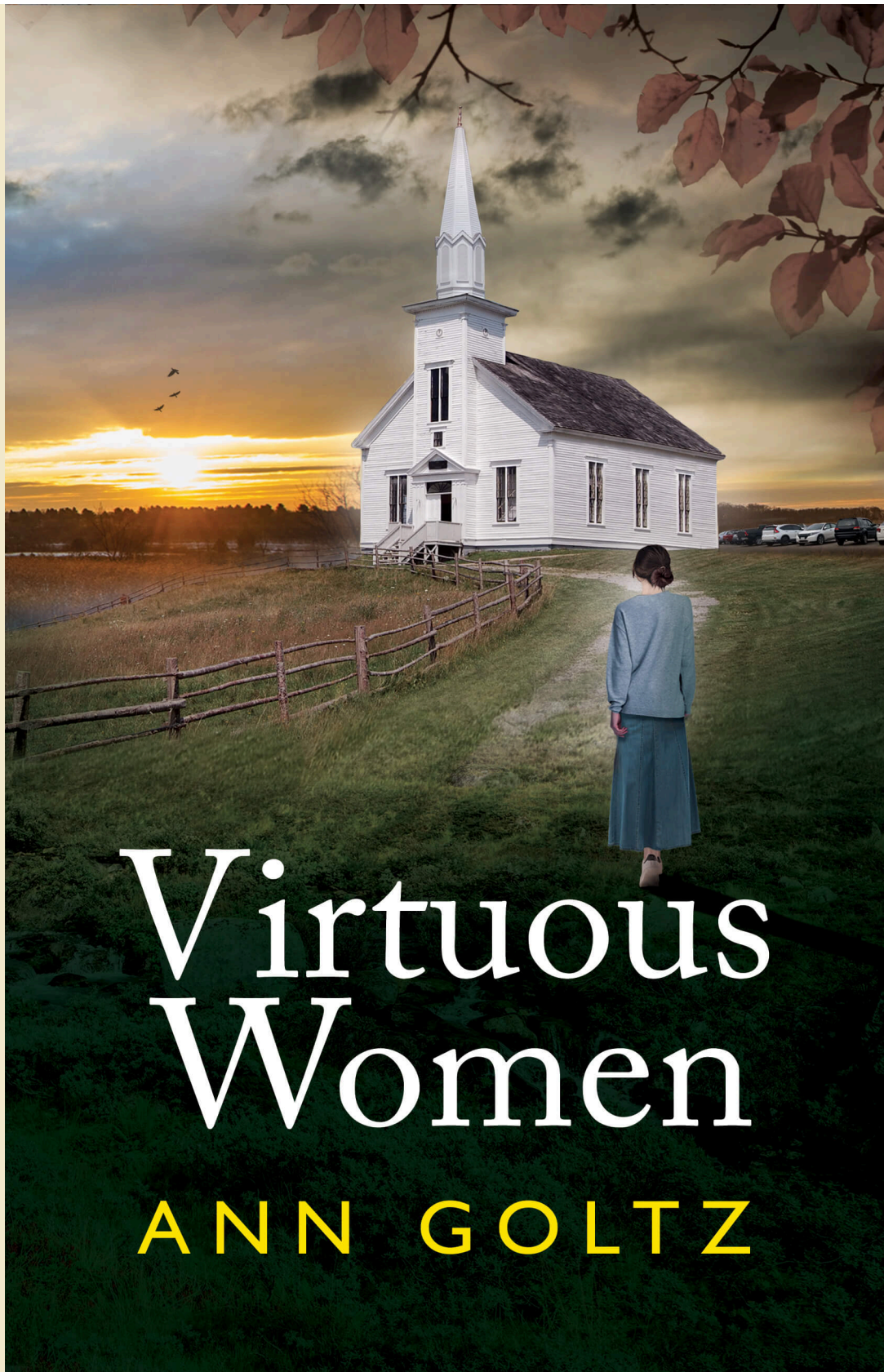


856 'Tis the Gift to Be Simple



Text: Joseph Brackett, Jr., 1797-1882

Tune: SIMPLE GIFTS, Joseph Brackett, Jr., 1797-1882. acc. Margaret W. Mealy, b. 1922. © 1964



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Cyber Monday Sale!!!

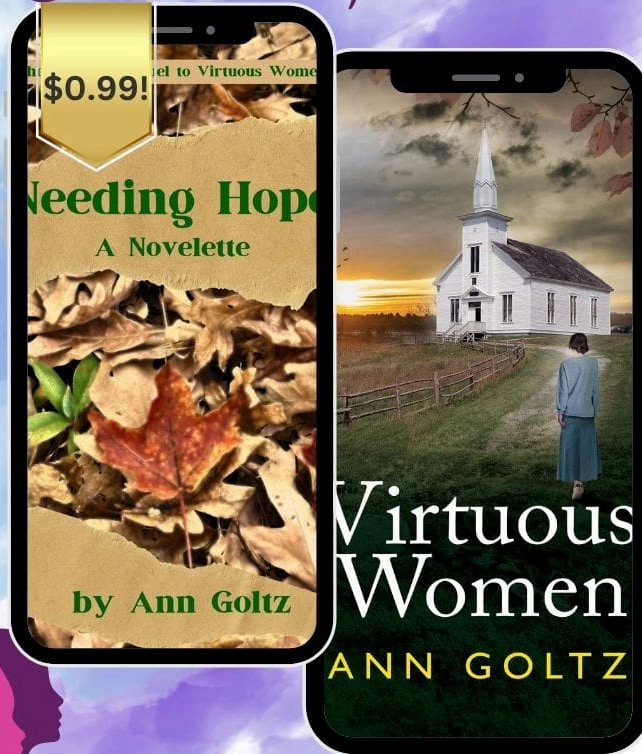
Journey: Women's Fiction

No contests this month, but that's because I'm part of a Cyber Monday promotion that includes dozens of free and discounted books. That's right! On Monday, December 2, all the books at the link above will be free or discounted. Every one of them is Women's Fiction, which is why I'm telling you about it. Some of the titles are contemporary, like mine, some are historical, some are paranormal or fantasy or science fiction, but all qualify as Women's Fiction.

I've dropped the prices of both my books for this sale. You should already have a digital copy of *Needing Hope*. That's the prequel to *Virtuous Women* that I gave as a gift for signing up for this newsletter. (If you didn't get your copy, just click [here](#) to download a free one now--I'm not going to charge you!) Or, if you really want to financially support me as a writer you can buy a copy on Amazon. Its usual price is \$1.99, but it'll go down to \$0.99 from November 29 through December 6. The e-book price for *Virtuous Women* will go from \$5.99 to \$2.99 during those same dates. And I've decided to reduce the paperback from \$16.99 to \$12.99.

Dec 2nd, 2024

JOURNEY: WOMEN'S FICTION



HOST: TRACEY LOVE



Ann Goltz

So be sure to bookmark the link

<https://www.traceyloveauthor.com/journey-womensfiction> and check it out on Monday, December 2. My books are discounted for a week, but I can't promise that's true of the other books. They will all be discounted on Cyber Monday, however.

Here's a glimpse of some of what's available. Don't miss out!

Dec 2nd, 2024

JOURNEY: WOMEN'S FICTION

MAEVE in the MORNING
AMANDA GALE

KATHERIN and the WIND
MANDA GAL

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Amanda Gale

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The Told

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FEISTY DEEDS

THE HORNED WOMEN

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beautiful.

amaged

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Deceptive Hearts

harbored and Me

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CATCH ALL TOO

WAKE THE DEAD

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Sophia Mattiara Whittemore

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WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS

JUPITER'S RISING

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C.R. Jones

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JOURNEY: WOMEN'S FICTION

STARS OF ORAELIA

STARS OF ORAELIA

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Raquel Mudryk

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*Disclosure: I am an affiliate of Bookshop.org and I will earn a small commission if you click through and make a purchase.

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