
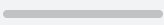




Light a Candle

 journal.workthatreconnects.org/2023/09/02/light-a-candle/

by Judy Myerson

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Recorded by author

A different view and story of who we are as a species, and a change in collective course of action are needed, and needed now.

The news and extreme weather are bells of mindfulness, sounding daily (1). They are telling us clearly that we humans need to act collectively now and with purpose in order to mitigate the extent of the damage already done by us as a species to our beautiful planet and all her beings, relieve the suffering that is unfolding before us, and decrease the future suffering predicted to ensue. There are many “solutions” and some progress, but not sufficient or fast enough, and the backlash and divisiveness being experienced takes away focus and any forward movement. The three poisons of Buddhism — greed, hatred and ignorance, along with human-centered, patriarchal, white-supremacist, extractive view and actions — have come home full circle as collective Karma. A different view and story of who we are as a species, and a change in collective course of action are needed, and needed now. As this rapidly unfolds, however, many in the United States and in most other privileged countries throughout the world continue acting as if business is as usual...

if we do fully look at reality as it is, we are often at a loss as to how we can possibly hold it all

Our human nervous systems, bodies, and brains are not designed to handle this ongoing, massive input and threat, and so many of us tend to turn away, as if in the Netflix parody of reality, “Don’t Look Up,” and numb or distract ourselves. And if we do fully look at reality as it is, we are often at a loss as to how we can possibly hold it all, allow ourselves to fully feel the extent of our pain and grief, and move through our despair to Going Forth – even within the Spiral of the Work that Reconnects.

And then, I hear the voice of our root teacher, Joanna Macy, in my ear, reminding us:

Being fully present to fear, to gratitude, to all that is – this is the practice of mutual belonging. As living members of the living body of Earth, we are grounded in that kind of belonging. We will find ways to remember, celebrate, and affirm this deep knowing: we belong to each other, we belong to Earth. Even when faced with cataclysmic changes, nothing can ever separate

us from her. We are already home. The practice of mutual belonging is the medicine for the sickness of the small self and can accompany us through the bardo, through the hard times ahead (2).

In March, 2022, I attended a Garrison Institute online forum with Thomas Hübl on “Healing Collective Trauma through Relationality, Attunement and Presence”. The term he used, “Bearing Witness” – a universal practice or tenet in many spiritual traditions including the Zen Peacemakers – struck a chord. As “Bearing Witness” continued to resonate in me over the following months and I reflected on our history and evolution as a species, a poem and vision of a new collective ritual for holding and honoring our communal pain for the world began to emerge. All we really have are our actions (3). This remembrance, along with the knowledge that we are not separate selves, that what we each do – if done with love, true presence and moral integrity – has meaning and impact in widening circles, was also the inspiration behind “Light a Candle”.

I have a vision of candles lit in windows all over the world shining continuous light, bearing witness to our collective grief and loss, and illuminating our path

I share this poem with you in hopes that if it speaks to you, you will join me in lighting a candle and placing it in your window every evening – or if that’s not possible, then on Sunday evenings. I have a vision of candles lit in windows all over the world shining continuous light, bearing witness to our collective grief and loss, and illuminating our path— a path to a new story of our collective evolution as a species that lives in harmony with and for the benefit of all people, all beings, and Gaia, our Mother Earth.

Along with your candle, if you are so moved, please also place a sign in your window that speaks to your aspiration – a single word or statement of intention, such as “I light this candle for (peace, kindness, justice)”, or “With this candle I honor my commitment to our shared planet”. You might also choose to place in the window a picture of a loved one – perhaps a grandchild, an ancestor who guides you, or a treasured place.

Please feel free to share this writing and poem, in whole or in part, inviting others in your circles to join in shining light. If anyone would like to work with me on helping this vision manifest, including those with social media and some tech expertise, please email me at jmyerson1@icloud.com. All are invited to share in the comment section about your experience of placing a candle in your window, bearing witness and shining your light.

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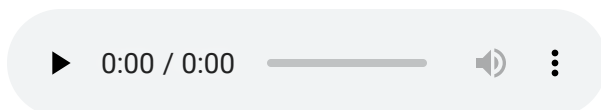
A note on the use of “we”:

The “We” I am referring to is the human species, collectively. While some groups, cultures and individuals are clearly more responsible and culpable than others for the current situation we are in, and many, especially indigenous cultures, live in more harmony and reciprocity with the Earth, it is my understanding that all humans have the capacity for violence, perpetration, otherizing, extraction, turning away, etc. Just as all humans have the capacity for love, compassion, connectedness, generosity, working together, altruism and more.

What we do is dependent on causes and conditions. Please see Thich Nhat Hanh’s poem, “Please Call Me by My True Names” (4), and his commentary on his writing of the poem for more clarification of this: <https://plumvillage.org/articles/please-call-me-by-my-true-names-song-poem>.

References:

1. Thich Nhat Hanh, *The World We Have*, Parallax Press, 2008, pg.1
2. Joanna Macy, *A Wild Love For the World, Joanna Macy and the Work of Our Time*, Stephanie Kaza ed., Shambhala Publications, 2020, pg. 360
3. Thich Nhat Hanh et al, *Chanting from the Heart, Volume 2*, Parallax Press, 2023 (revised edition), pg. 228
4. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Call me by my True Names, The Collected Poems of Thich Nhat Hanh*, Parallax Press, 1999, pg. 72



Recorded by the author

Light a candle

tonight
and
every night

please

bear witness
to
the suffering

and
to that
which will
ensue

the climate chaos
violence

here
now

to
the birds
bees
butterflies
animals
plants
fungi
and tiny creatures
yet unseen

as
they
disappear

and to us humans
as
we continue
to run
hide
deny
distract

delude
and
destroy

each other
and
this beautiful world
given to us

a gift
that
we just...

took

Light a candle

tonight
and
every night

please

bear witness
to our grief
at what
and who
we each
and all
treasured
and loved
and
have already
lost

and to our rage

and
regret...

it did not have to be
this way

Light a candle

tonight
and
every night

for those

in fear

seeking

safety

shelter

food

future

for those we

harm

turn our back on

use

abuse

brutalize

bomb

extract

and

throw away

not knowing

that

when we

cut off their humanity

we also cut off

ours

and our ability to feel

anything

even

joy...

Light a candle

tonight

and

every night

please

for all those

who

each in their way

big

and small
shine the light of
love
and
compassion

who
speak up
step up
show up
reach out...

act
protect
and
create

bear witness
to
their
caring
courage
creativity
commitment

and know
that
this too...

is you

Light a candle

tonight
and
every night

and...

when we each

all

place our candles
in our windows
and
open our eyes
and look
and see...

we will know
we
are not alone

or separate

and that
the
lights
that we see
also
shine
from within

glimmering
reflecting
connecting

beacons...

illuminating
our path

as together
we
find
our way

on
this

New Day

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recorded by Erin Holtz Braeckman

Judith Myerson is a retired Psychotherapist and Order of Interbeing member in the Plum Village Community of Engaged Buddhism, receiving transmission from Thich Nhat Hanh in 2007. She practices and facilitates with various sanghas and initiatives, including the Earth Holder Community, Deep Roots Beloved Community Circle and at Blue Cliff Monastery. Judy trained in the 2019 WTR facilitator development program and as a Trauma Resource Institute's Community Resilience Model teacher. She is looking with new eyes at how she can best serve to create a more just and sustainable world for her children's children and all future generations. She also finds much joy with the birds at her feeders and at the Bashakill Marsh, not far from her home in Pine Bush, NY.



photo by Mia Bieber