



Winter Words from the House of Peace

*Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,*

*I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.*
(W.B. Yeats)

In these times of cataclysmic upheavals upon this earth and among its peoples, we often fix our gaze upon the heavens for signs, symbols, even consolation. Solar eclipse and super moon have joined with the regular wonders of sunrise, sunset, dawn and dusk. We've come to seek a deeper insight into these miraculously embroidered cloths of heaven, recognizing in gold and silver light a presence, a possibility, a protection.

But yes, some of us are very poor. We can't call down those magnificent mantles of the heavens. We can only hold them out to this world as our dreams: dreams of silver and light, dreams of freedom by day and safety by night....dreams we can place as gift—as hope—as promise under the feet of the other.

But what is happening here in our staggeringly repressive nation to our “Dreamers” who have since childhood offered their innermost striving and lives of great achievement to a country now in danger of treading upon delicate dreams with crushing boots? DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) is in peril, the fiery debate around it a violation of truth and justice. The “American Dream” is torn from the ground of national identity and in its place there would grow a wall, a cement nightmare. Diversity Visas, celebrating openness to culture and creativity: in danger of permanent decimation. “Chain Migration”, family reunification, the rights of families to live together in safety and freedom: under attack with merciless rhetoric. Temporary Protective Status, offering security, work, life and safety after irreparable harm in one's native country: revoked for thousands, more to follow. Work visas, student visas...the dreams and needs of the multitudes, all “under review” by the scrutinizing eyes of those who perhaps never look up to any heaven.

These are our people. Our families and children and friends and co-workers. These are the dreamers who keep us human. These are the ones touched by profound suffering, rising up with such inexplicable resilience, whose dreams are often a mirror of the divine.

Yes, there is a warning here about treading softly where dreamers are concerned. Something to do with the sacred, for in the end it is all about justice, all about rights, all about love. And so that well-known mantram, sung with no language barrier here at the House of Peace from the very beginning, echoes still as we Imagine:

You may say I'm a dreamer but I'm not the only one.
I hope someday you'll join us....And the world will live as one.

Behold! The Dreamer Cometh

At Boston's Logan Airport, Terminal E, International Arrivals, the dream often approaches fulfillment. An exhausted parent presents to us an injured child. Relief at safe arrival and hope for the huge medical journey about to begin mingle in a rush of introductions and welcomes. This past year children from Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Burundi have filled the House of Peace with an intense array of needs and achievements. Successful surgeries at Shriners Burn Hospital in Boston have transformed the lives and futures of many of our child-guests. Political asylum proceedings have given a promise of life itself to another. Babies of "alumnae" of the House of Peace from El Salvador, Uganda and Nigeria have come for precious Christening celebrations. International friends settled into ever-more-diverse Ipswich spend afternoons here welcoming and reassuring newcomers. Days are spent in seminars and negotiations with immigration attorneys, in meetings, courtrooms and newly-found apartments for our refugee friends. And one spectacular evening found us at a much-anticipated Town Meeting where Ipswich voted to be a town of Sanctuary! In the midst of danger, degradation and rejection our seaside corner of this brilliantly diverse world will continue to be "careful for justice and eager for integrity."

(Isaiah 16:5)

The House of Peace committed core: Mary Ellen, Geraldine and Nick continue to anchor us in a quickly flowing current of activities: study groups, readings, lectures, conferences and countless guests...Peace walks, vigils, Veterans for Peace breakfasts and Peace and Justice Coalition evenings, and youth groups from near and far. Projects continue from the past, especially work on our land, garden and venerable house. New projects call from the future to be organized and carried out with the help of wonderful volunteers and our devoted Board of Directors.

The "breath of magic" that is community life empowers our spirit, undaunted by the forces around us that would extinguish the flame of hope. We are grateful.

THE RETURN

The day after Christmas. An unusual afternoon hush in this House of Peace. A knock on the door. Faces unrecognized at first...surely familiar...Sudden recognition, reunion, rejoicing. Sonja and her husband have returned after 19 years! "We came to say thank you." From Texas, by plane, train and walk....They retold their story of their sudden and dangerous escape from Bosnia in 1999; the landing at Logan and midnight arrival, via Catholic Charities, at the House of Peace; the exhaustion and depression of the parents and excitement of their three young children; the first meals, walks, relaxing, planning....

"You saved our lives. We had to come back to tell you that, to thank you."

There is no way to describe the joy in our sunny Christmas kitchen when Sonja and her husband came back to give thanks. We can only bow in reverent gratitude before the mystery of this return.

House of Peace Internship and Volunteer Program

We never cease to marvel at the paths traveled by young people in search of truth, hope and trust. In the past year remarkable German Waldorf High School graduates have been among the core of our interns and volunteers sharing the life of our community. While our American interns, like Peter and Heather who this past year gave so much, are able to stay indefinitely, German visas allow only a three month stay. How condensed and intense it becomes ---- how joyful and lively --- when discovery must happen so quickly.

Our young helpers were all avid students, deeply engaging in the unique tutorials on peace and justice which John offered over meals or while working together on the land. Paul, Marlene, Carlotta, Jonas and Tassilo were such devoted workers, with each varied task undertaken with enthusiasm and hard work, and remarkable, so-needed skills to share. As compassionate caregivers, each day was warmed by the gentle wisdom and keen interest of Mary Ellen and Geraldine, the flair and striving of Nick, giving back a deep level of understanding and service. When wounded children come and these youth of the rising generation encounter the true “face of war” the experience transcends the shock and becomes reverence, deep searching, new resolve.

Most of our interns stay in touch, often reflecting on their time at the House of Peace with words such as these, received from a young woman from Berlin:

When I came to the House of Peace I was full of questions and doubts. And the questions remain. And still, something in me has drastically changed. Instead of doubt, I can feel trust and hope now. Hope that I might be able one day to overcome the big gap between my higher ideals and my actual feelings, thoughts and behavior. I feel a responsibility to do something with all you have shown and taught me. Instead of being scared by that, I trust the voice of truth in me that is yet so soft. One does not know what the tree will look like when one plants a seed. It is important though to take care of it and water it so it can prosper beautifully one day. It has been so strengthening to meet the House of Peace and gain the trust, patience and hope to never forget to water ‘my inner seed’.





Editor's note: On Dec. 10, 2017 the International Committee to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, in Oslo, Norway. Setsuko Thurlow, a survivor of the bombing of Hiroshima, accepted the award and gave this stunning, historic speech. Setsuko is a personal friend who, in 1983, was called as a witness in the trial of the AVCO Plowshares in Lowell, MA. John and the other defendants surrounded Setsuko in compassionate solidarity when the judge refused to let her speak because "Hiroshima is not relevant. It is too long ago." Setsuko cried out: "But people are still dying today!" Now at last the world can hear this powerful testimony.

Above: John and Carrie with Setsuko at the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament (2015)

Distinguished members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, My fellow campaigners, here and throughout the world, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to accept this award, together with Beatrice, on behalf of all the remarkable human beings who form the ICAN movement. You each give me such tremendous hope that we can -- and will -- bring the era of nuclear weapons to an end.

I speak as a member of the family of hibakusha -- those of us who, by some miraculous chance, survived the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For more than seven decades, we have worked for the total abolition of nuclear weapons.

We have stood in solidarity with those harmed by the production and testing of these horrific weapons around the world. People from places with long-forgotten names, like Moruroa, Ekker, Semipalatinsk, Maralinga, Bikini. People whose lands and seas were irradiated, whose bodies were experimented upon, whose cultures were forever disrupted.

We were not content to be victims. We refused to wait for an immediate fiery end or the slow poisoning of our world. We refused to sit idly in terror as the so-called great powers took us past nuclear dusk and brought us recklessly close to nuclear midnight. We rose up. We shared our stories of survival. We said: humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist.

Today, I want you to feel in this hall the presence of all those who perished in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I want you to feel, above and around us, a great cloud of a quarter million souls. Each person had a name. Each person was loved by someone. Let us ensure that their deaths were not in vain.

I was just 13 years old when the United States dropped the first atomic bomb, on my city Hiroshima. I still vividly remember that morning. At 8:15, I saw a blinding bluish-white flash from the window. I remember having the sensation of floating in the air.

As I regained consciousness in the silence and darkness, I found myself pinned by the collapsed building. I began to hear my classmates' faint cries: "Mother, help me. God, help me."

Then, suddenly, I felt hands touching my left shoulder, and heard a man saying: "Don't give up! Keep pushing! I am trying to free you. See the light coming through that opening? Crawl towards it as quickly as you can." As I crawled out, the ruins were on fire. Most of my classmates in that building were burned to death alive. I saw all around me utter, unimaginable devastation.

Processions of ghostly figures shuffled by. Grotesquely wounded people, they were bleeding, burnt, blackened and swollen. Parts of their bodies were missing. Flesh and skin hung from their bones. Some with their eyeballs hanging in their hands. Some with their bellies burst open, their intestines hanging out. The foul stench of burnt human flesh filled the air.

Thus, with one bomb my beloved city was obliterated. Most of its residents were civilians who were incinerated, vaporized, carbonized -- among them, members of my own family and 351 of my schoolmates.

In the weeks, months and years that followed, many thousands more would die, often in random and mysterious ways, from the delayed effects of radiation. Still to this day, radiation is killing survivors.

Whenever I remember Hiroshima, the first image that comes to mind is of my four-year-old nephew, Eiji - his little body transformed into an unrecognizable melted chunk of flesh. He kept begging for water in a faint voice until his death released him from agony.

To me, he came to represent all the innocent children of the world, threatened as they are at this very moment by nuclear weapons. Every second of every day, nuclear weapons endanger everyone we love and everything we hold dear. We must not tolerate this insanity any longer.

Through our agony and the sheer struggle to survive -- and to rebuild our lives from the ashes -- we hibakusha became convinced that we must warn the world about these apocalyptic weapons. Time and again, we shared our testimonies.

But still some refused to see Hiroshima and Nagasaki as atrocities -- as war crimes. They accepted the propaganda that these were "good bombs" that had ended a "just war". It was this myth that led to the disastrous nuclear arms race -- a race that continues to this day.

Nine nations still threaten to incinerate entire cities, to destroy life on earth, to make our beautiful world uninhabitable for future generations. The development of nuclear weapons signifies not a country's elevation to greatness, but its descent to the darkest depths of depravity. These weapons are not a necessary evil; they are the ultimate evil.

On the seventh of July this year, I was overwhelmed with joy when a great majority of the world's nations voted to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Having witnessed humanity at its worst, I witnessed, that day, humanity at its best. We hibakusha had been waiting for the ban for seventy-two years. Let this be the beginning of the end of nuclear weapons.

All responsible leaders will sign this treaty. And history will judge harshly those who reject it. No longer shall their abstract theories mask the genocidal reality of their practices. No longer shall "deterrence" be viewed as anything but a deterrent to disarmament. No longer shall we live under a mushroom cloud of fear.

To the officials of nuclear-armed nations -- and to their accomplices under the so-called "nuclear umbrella" -- I say this: Listen to our testimony. Heed our warning. And know that your actions are consequential. You are each an integral part of a system of violence that is endangering humankind. Let us all be alert to the banality of evil.

To every president and prime minister of every nation of the world, I beseech you: Join this treaty; forever eradicate the threat of nuclear annihilation.

When I was a 13-year-old girl, trapped in the smouldering rubble, I kept pushing. I kept moving toward the light. And I survived. Our light now is the ban treaty. To all in this hall and all listening around the world, I repeat those words that I heard called to me in the ruins of Hiroshima: "Don't give up! Keep pushing! See the light? Crawl towards it."

Tonight, as we march through the streets of Oslo with torches aflame, let us follow each other out of the dark night of nuclear terror. No matter what obstacles we face, we will keep moving and keep pushing and keep sharing this light with others. This is our passion and commitment for our one precious world to survive.

PLAYING WITH FIRE

*How can we learn from each other to grasp the fire of the Spirit....
to catch the spark...feed the flame...spread the fire?*

This remarkable question... call... invitation... generated by the international Movement for Religious Renewal, the Christian Community, was heard around the world in 2017.

The result: a Conference in Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands, during the early days of June. In the mood of Whitsun 1200 people representing 50 countries gathered in a huge conference center ignited by the challenging theme: Playing With Fire! Five hundred of the participants were young people who brought art, music, dance... question, debate and insight to the dynamic dialogue that embraced a full spectrum of this world's seeking souls. Lectures, seminars, artistic offerings of all kinds in all languages... conversations, festive meals, deeply shared prayer and Sacrament unfolded throughout the days.

The House of Peace had been honored with an invitation to share our life and work in the "Marketplace" of initiatives from all over the world. Our photo display of the children of the House of Peace, so many of them tragically burned by the fires of war, unveiled a common language and led to intensely moving conversations with new friends from many countries. We hold the flame of this mighty event with gratitude and renewed commitment to strive to enkindle the fire of justice in this suffering world.

WESTERBORK

About 120 miles from Hertogenbosch in Holland there lies the site of the Westerbork Concentration Camp. From here, approximately 106,000 Jews were transported to their deaths at extermination camps in Poland between 1942-1944. One such prisoner of Westerbork (from July 1942-September 1943) was Etty Hillesum, long a "patron saint" of the House of Peace. Her personal diaries (*An Interrupted Life*) and her *Letters from Westerbork* continue to inspire people worldwide. As we visited this historic, heart-rending center of the ultimate violation of human rights, we pondered the force of the true Fire of Spirit to awaken and empower this world to truth, morality and justice. These words of Etty Hillesum, who wanted to live her time at Westerbork as "the thinking heart of the barracks," will continue to speak for the rights of all refugees:

One day we shall be building a whole new world. Against every new outrage and every fresh horror, we shall put up one more piece of love and goodness, drawing strength from within ourselves. We may suffer but we must not succumb. And if we should survive unhurt in body and soul, but above all in soul, without bitterness and without hatred, then we shall have a right to a say after the war. Maybe I am an ambitious woman but I would like to have a say after the war.
(Westerbork, 3 July 1943)

In Memoriam

So great a cloud of witnesses surround us.

So let us cast out everything that pulls us down and entangles us.

Let us continue with endurance the fight which has been laid upon us.

St. Paul: Hebrews 12:1

At the House of Peace we mark the months as we journey through the Zodiac's twelve-fold cycle. We feel the planetary rhythms in the seven days of each week. And we live deeply in each day's rhythm from sunrise to sunset, into the starry depths of each night. And all the while we feel this cloud around us; we turn to them within us.

So great a cloud of witnesses. They have died but live on. They have crossed into a Spirit-world but touch so mysteriously our lives on earth. We have known them and loved them as family, friends, colleagues in "the fight laid upon us." Others we know differently in the bonds that connect us in the human family, one to the other. They are refugees drowned at sea, children beset by every level of war and violence; families buried in mudslides, elders perishing in fires, those crossing over through illness, disaster, war. These are the witnesses to the anguish of our world and our responsibility to transform it.

So great a cloud of witnesses. Our beloved friend, the late Dr. Vincent Harding, reminded us of their power to accompany and strengthen us:

To know them, to know that they are present, is to know that regardless of how alone we feel sometimes, we are never alone. We are never alone. Nowhere, no how, in nothing. Never!

Other witnesses there are in this world, some filling the House of Peace each day with lives of suffering and resilience, hope, and purpose. These times of national chaos and international upheaval bring to our door more than ever those who need special support. Your gifts, in all their forms, welcome and sustain these guests who find us and seek our help.

We are deeply grateful for your strengthening presence and your contributions to the House of Peace.

Enclosed is my gift for the House of Peace:

Name _____

Address _____

Amount _____

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House of Peace, Inc. is a therapeutic community serving victims of war, in companionship with adults with disabilities and offering education for peace and moral awakening, incorporated in Massachusetts in 1990 as a 501(c)3 tax-exempt charitable and educational corporation supported by voluntary contributions.
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2018

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

*Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of the tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.*

*Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.*

*You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.*

*Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors
gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.*

from "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou