

WINTER WORDS FROM THE HOUSE OF PEACE

In breathing the human being is entirely conjoined with the cosmos. The air which I have just breathed in was formerly an ingredient in the cosmos, and it will afterwards become an ingredient in the cosmos once more....Anyone who experiences this--anyone with a real feeling for this breathing process--will find in it one of the most marvelous mysteries of the whole formation of the world.

(Rudolf Steiner March 1923)

It sometimes seems that the very Breath of the World has been taken away. The words of Genesis marking the sacred winds of Spirit sweeping over the waters and the holy power of "Ruah" breathing life into all creation stun us all the more as we behold our Earth Mother gasp in pain: "I can't breathe."

The marvelous mysteries of cosmic formation battle the mysterious desecration of materialism's demonic powers. Our sacred images of wind and air confront the force of raging fires throughout the world, the common language of suffocation in flames choking out the plea: "I can't breathe."

On a street in Minneapolis in the heat of early summer a tragedy heard round the world erupts. George Floyd becomes the epicenter of all the asphyxiating sins of a nation as he whispers his own helpless epitaph: "I can't breathe."

The "pneuma" of Spirit-enlivened human respiration succumbs to the corona crisis that weakens and sickens as people cry out: "I can't breathe."

The human family is quarantined with the reassuring mantram: "We're all in this together."

But the isolation creates devastation and so many are left to die alone.

Homelessness and hunger ravage the masses as we struggle to inhale and exhale behind our masks, craving the warmth of each other's smiles.

The suffering of "pan demic"--literally, "all the people"--escalates in its many horrific forms.

How can we possibly rise now from the darkness of insurrection to the light of Resurrection--from the dangers of a kind of mass imprisonment to the freedom of a health-restoring life?

Maybe we need some slow, winding Lenten path that leads us, step by step, inhale by exhale, away from the breath-taking abyss to the safe haven of renewed community imbued with the vitality of heart-filled thinking. Maybe we can ponder the marvelous mystery that unites our every breath with the very world foundations. Maybe we can become ever more human.

Maybe the first thing we can do

To prevent "I can't breathe"

Is to let love be the first act

That takes our breath away

(Sekou Andrews "Love Says")

Carrie Schochardt
February, 2021

THE WORLD HAS SPOKEN THE NUCLEAR BAN TREATY HAS BECOME LAW

In all of human history has there ever been a more breath-taking event than the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945? For in those nuclear blasts the very lungs of a quarter million people were compressed and crushed by the force of the dawn of the Nuclear Age. The breath of life was exhaled in desperate pain.. The breathing of the cosmos itself was suffocated.

And now, as the universe comes ever closer to devastation and extinction by a Nuclear Winter, there comes a ray of light, a breath of warmth, a hope. On October 24, 2020 Honduras became the 50th country to ratify the historic United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). This day marked the 75th anniversary of the founding of the UN whose first goal was to address the tremendous threat of nuclear weapons to the world. Ninety days later, on Jan. 22, 2021 this treaty entered into force as international law. So far 86 countries have signed it. And 51 countries have ratified it (meaning they are bound by its provisions). The treaty forbids everything to do with nuclear weapons, including developing, testing, producing, manufacturing or otherwise acquiring, possessing, stockpiling, transferring, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons. This treaty comes from the world since all countries are at risk from the horrific presence of these weapons on our planet. The nine nations possessing these weapons, including the US, have so far boycotted this treaty, but their operations and contracts, supplying and investing in these countries that have signed could finally result in the criminalization of these acts of nuclear proliferation.

The Catholic Archbishops of Hiroshima and Nagasaki issued a statement on Jan. 22, 2021: *Today is that special day that A-bomb survivors and countless people who hope for a peaceful world without nuclear weapons have longed for. It is the beginning of the final stage and we share the joy....However more is needed. International cooperation is needed/ The participation of all nations is required.*

In 2017, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) who facilitated the treaty at the UN, received the Nobel Peace Prize. This moment of the enforcement of the TPNW echoes the unfogettable acceptance speech given at Oslo (Dec.10, 2017) by our beloved friend, Setsuko Thurlow (see House of Peace Newsletter Feb., 2018 on our website.)

As a survivor of the bombing of Hiroshima she lifts her voice:

We were not content to be victims. We refused to wait for an immediate fiery end to 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. We said: humanity and nuclear weapons cannot coexist.



On Jan. 22 Setsuko, seen here with John and Carrie at the UN, wept tears of joy and vowed to continue campaigning "to my dying breath."

***To watch the birth and death of beings is like looking at the movements of a dance.
A lifetime is like a flash of lightning in the sky,
rushing by, like a torrent down a steep mountain
(Guatama Buddha)***

Sometimes it happens that we are called to be midwives, hovering over the translucent shell that soon will break open to release a soul into birth and life's dance upon this earth...or, more tender still, to free a soul into life beyond the threshold of death. Both experiences fill one with speechless awe and humble reverence.

In the warmth of Maytime blossoms and beauty, by a quiet lake in Rhode Island, the vibrant dance of the life of Charles Kevin Donohue, brother to myself and sisters, Mary Ellen and Sheila, came to its final movements. The rushing torrents of Kevin's vitality had cascaded into countless lives. He was the father of seven children and teacher and guidance counselor for more than thirty years to hundreds of students in Marlborough MA. In retirement hundreds more people felt Kev's mighty spirit surround them as he tirelessly devoted himself to the important work of Habitat for Humanity. Kev built with a passion to serve others, marshalling the volunteer help of scores of University of Rhode Island students who loved him dearly. They worked side by side with incredible enthusiasm and joy.

*We will build this house with the strength of our arms as a shelter from all harm....
A house of warmth, a house just right, a house to keep away the darkest night,
A house of hope, a house of peace, a house where all within may safely stay. (Sally Rogers)*

The flow of Kev's remarkable life came to its end on May 16, 2020 as the long washing away of his strength through multiple health problems brought him to the doorway of a New House. His last word was breathed out at that threshold: "Beautiful!" Was it a final cry to his beloved wife bending over him...or an exclamation of wonder at the Dwelling opening to him? Was it Both? We gathered to share it all, praying, anointing, gently washing as the sun set over the lake he loved so much. How the tears of sadness flowed, but so too the immense gratitude for the fullness of his life.

And as the child-bed is watched on earth with anxious expectancy, so the couch of the dying, as we call them, may be surrounded by the birth-watchers of the other world, waiting like anxious servants to open the door to which this world is but the wind-blown porch. (G.M.)



AND THEN CAME TAYO!!

Again, wordless wonder and radiating reverence sweep over the heart as one beholds the miracle of a grandson whose newborn house is so clearly a Temple. Born to my daughter, Ethna, and her husband, Ver-Nard, just days after the fifth birthday of brother, Nico, this tiny Tayo ("bringer of joy") began his own dance into life's mysteries. Did the flow of imponderable destinies wash upon one ascending into spiritual realms and this child descending into the loving arms of a special family? Joyfully we give thanks. Farewell, Kev! Welcome Tayo!



HOUSE OF PEACE SUMMER "CHORUS"



***NOOR—Her name means Light.
And her light illumined us all in dark times.
Her suffering since birth has been relentless.
Her patience is enduring, her courage unfailing.
Her healing is a matter of persistence and hope.
Daughter of Iraq, child of the House of Peace,
You live in our heart. We will never forget you.***



"Our relationships are the only thing that are going to save us." (Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.)

What more profound gift must we cherish and nourish than the expansive web of relationships that holds us in destiny's mysterious web! The House of Peace is privileged to work closely together with a network of individuals, organizations and communities. We share the tasks of serving refugees. We honor living in community with those whose special abilities are a source of healing. We confront the depths of injustice and collaborate to build paths to peace. There are monthly check-ins and planning with the North American Council of communities devoted to serving those with special needs...and frequent conversations with our Camphill colleagues. There is warm solidarity with a large circle exploring the Being of Sophia in this vast universe... Anthroposophical Study Groups, Eurythmy classes, and so much more. The halting technology of togetherness does impede us when we must use it, but there is a will to carry on, a commitment to communicate in these times, a hope to grow and be useful. This we gratefully celebrate—for this, in the end, will save us.

南無妙法蓮華經

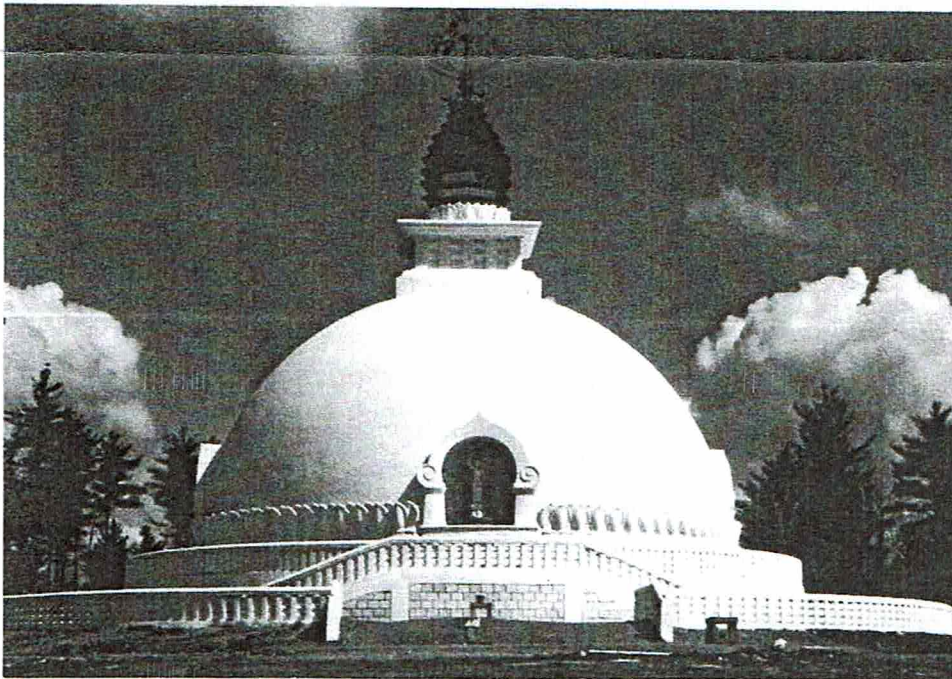
"Just as the height of winter is the prelude to spring, the fear that shrouds humanity can be seen as a harbinger of peace, leading to a sudden upsurge of spiritual vigor sprouting in the hearts and minds of humanity...."

Humanity's challenge in the latter half of the 20th century is to choose between extinction and great unity through reconciliation. It is in turn a choice of victory for violence or for human spirituality...

The path for genuine universal liberation is there for humanity to choose with courage, faith in humanity and spiritual values. .."

"The time has come when we can no longer sit or stand idle but are compelled to rush out of the confines of our homes. The time has come to look up to the heavens, bow to the earth, voice our concerns to one and all"

(Teaching of the Most Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii, founder of the Buddhist order, Nipponzon Myhoji. The tireless witness of these monks and nuns against nuclear weapons is an inspiration to all.)



Pandemic times are prayerful times when places of prayer become beacons of light. The New England Peace Pagoda (100 Cave Hill Rd., Leverett, MA) is such a place: "a visible form of prayer for inseparable peace in the world and within the minds of all humanity." The House of Peace is humbly grateful for our deep connection to the Pagoda community. We honor its 35 years of profound service to this world and echo these words from a ceremony (2010): "There are no boundaries for the words spoken and prayed here now and for generations to come, and for the works and walks born here, selfless and generous, given to the world that has such need of them—raying out from this center—sent out for healing and devotion—and thereby resounding back to this Pagoda from which they have their source. "

LIVING LIFE IN LOCKDOWN

*My life goes on in endless song
Above earth's lamentations.
I hear the real, though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.*

*Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear its music singing.
It sounds an echo in my soul
How can I keep from singing.*

It seemed to begin so suddenly in 2020...a mid-March command—worldwide!
Shelter in place---stay at home---keep distant from one another—leave school and workplace—
don a mask—wash your hands and stay safe.

At the House of Peace this litany of lockdown was hard to translate to those in our care:
Mother with daughter from Iraq undergoing urgent medical treatment at a Boston hospital;
vulnerable elders living with us, suddenly bereft of all programs and precious social contacts;
alumni refugees living close by or far away, confused and disoriented by an unseen danger;
children suddenly navigating “remote education,” barred even from their playgrounds.

By Easter this crescendo reached its climax: we were not allowed into our churches.
We were not allowed to sing.

Then we knew we had to find our way through “all the tumult and the strife” for, in this
House of Peace, “How can we keep from singing?” Music keeps community alive.

Easter dawn found us on the shore of the great ocean. Few we were, compared to our usual
gathering for the Easter Sunrise. But grateful we were to be together to see the Mighty Sun break
through the darkness and trumpet a new season. Silent we were, until a lone woman's voice was
raised in song: “Alleluia!” Softly at first, gaining strength, the Song rose with the Sun as others
joined this choir on a frosty Easter dawn at the edge of the sea, carrying the grief of the sick and
dying, singing with hope for the beauty of living”Alleluia!”

Weeks became months and we struggled to balance and honor the caring admonitions to
“Stay Safe” with the urgent mission of the House of Peace to be for others a refuge, a safe house,
a shelter from all harm. Loss and sadness edged into our souls as some felt shut in, others shut
out from life's normal supports. But long walks by the sea and in State parks,
wheelchair and all; long phone talks with friends, old and new, far and near; gifts of food, given
and received; the powerful rhythms of daily prayer for all those living and dying in such need;
the never-ceasing protection of loving relationships, tested and deepened by separation and
distance—all this and more became the Key to the locked doors of Life Lived Together.

.....And so we sing. And we will keep on singing. Many kinds of Song.....

the keening lament for those suffering, dying; and the blessed birth-rune for those being born;
the farewell song for Mother and daughter finally able to return to family in Iraq;
the joyful welcome song to those able to join us; the melodies of appreciation for all who trust
us, sustain us, love us. And always, our hymn to the Beings who carry us on.

*I am the rest between two notes, which are somehow always in discord
because Death's note wants to climb over—but in the dark interval, reconciled,
they stay there trembling. AND THE SONG GOES ON, BEAUTIFUL. (Rilke)*

IN MEMORIAM

We take it as a sacred responsibility in this House of Peace to offer our care, in spirit, thought and prayer, to those who have died. The ever-deepening rhythms and rituals of accompaniment of those at the threshold permeate our daily life, especially in these ritual-deprived times. The isolation of uncountable people dying alone, separated from loved ones, finds us grieving in new ways. And so all the more do we seek to share the suffering and build new hope.

We read in the 147th Psalm: *He knows the number of the stars and calls them each by name.* But how can we fathom the star-strewn heavens of souls who have crossed the threshold in this past year? Is the scope of death and dying so far beyond our comprehension and our care? Perhaps in the dark vastness of night we can gaze upwards and believe that, like every glimmering star, each being who has entered the world of spirit has a name—that each one is indeed known--that each is connected with us still. And so, to each one we offer our love:

“...far and near, unlost, soul-stars in the spiritual firmament.”

On this side of eternity, we carry on with the care of this nearly 300 year old house and all who come to live here. After an appeal on our website for help to repair our venerable chimney we have raised enough funds to keep the fires burning and the hearth ever ready for guests. We thank all who donated to that “Mighty Cause.”

Many have recognized how startling the impact the current economic disaster has for non-profit endeavors. We are in that boat with others who seek to serve those in great need. And we see on the wild waves of the vast oceans of this world’s economic pandemic whole boat-loads of those about to drown in unemployment, homelessness and hunger.

We simply go on as best we can, grateful for all the help that comes to us, earnest in our efforts to share all we have with all who come to us in need. We thank you for the help you give and assure you that those who are washed up upon our shore from the seas of suffering will feel the life-preserving solace of your gifts.

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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2021

When day comes we ask ourselves where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it. Somehow we do it. Somehow we've
weathered and witnessed a nation that isn't broken but simply unfinished....
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us....
We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.
We seek harm to none and harmony for all. Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true.
That even as we grieved, we grew. That even as we hurt, we hoped....
We will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.... We will rebuild, reconcile and
recover.... When day comes, we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid.
The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light.
If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it.

*(Excerpts from "The Hill We Climb":
Inaugural Poem by Amanda Gorman)*