

Last summer, I was speaking at a Quaker event in Ohio and happened to feel faint and had to sit down. It was late in the evening and I hadn't had time to eat since breakfast, so someone brought me a sandwich, which I ate. Those Quakers were very anxious for my well-being. I think they were afraid I was going to die on their watch. They kept asking how I was.

"Better, thank you," I would answer.

"Let us know if you need anything," they would say.

"I certainly will," I said. "Thank you for your concern."

Then they would pat my shoulder or take me by the hand or hug me and say "I'm holding you in the Light."

I had never been held in the Light quite to that extent and it felt comforting to be the recipient of so much loving attention. I remember another time when I wasn't feeling well and was at a very rigid, conservative church and they just kept asking me if I was right with the Lord, which isn't quite as uplifting as being told you are being held in the Light.

So there I was, being held in the Light, and it felt wonderful, being the object of deep and loving concern.

I am holding you in the Light. We Quakers say that when we intend to pray for someone, when we want for someone what God wants for them—peace and healing and well-being and soundness of mind and body and spirit. Though we often say it very casually, without much thought, ideally, it is more than just words.

I remember years ago reading a story of two prisoners of war who were imprisoned in a dark cell, illuminated only by a small six-inch square window about eight feet off the ground. Each day, they would take turns lifting one another up to the window, so each could feel the light upon his face, and see the sun and the outdoors and that way keep from going mad. To say to someone, “I will hold you in the Light,” is the verbal equivalent of lifting them up to God, lifting them up to light and goodness, so they can have hope and peace.

But it is more than words. We ought never say we are holding someone in the Light unless we are willing to lift them up to the window. In the book of James, it says, “If you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, “Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!” and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—what good does that do them? God-talk without God-acts is meaningless?” (*The Message*, James 2:15)

To hold someone in the Light is not a casual greeting that we toss off without thought. It is a promise to work for the betterment and well-being of another. We shouldn't say it unless we are prepared to do it. If we say to them, "I will hold you in the Light," we need to be prepared to lift them up to the window and give them soup and a coat.

During the war in the Congo in 2007, gangs of soldiers and mercenaries roamed the countryside at night raping and killing women and girls. Despite a United Nations peacekeeping force of 17,000 troops, the practice continued. It was finally discovered that if trucks were driven into the bush and villages with their headlights on, the women and girls could sleep safely in the light cast from the truck's headlights. When morning arrived, there would often be 3,000 villagers asleep on the ground, safely within the light's range. To hold someone in the Light is to stand beside them when they are unable to stand for themselves.

That is one aspect, our willingness to work for the betterment and well-being of another, to hold them in the Light when they can not hold themselves in the Light.

Now, let us go a bit further. We can hold someone *in* the Light, and we can hold someone *to* the Light. That is, we can hold someone *to* the Light when they are tempted to walk in darkness.

I had dinner a few weeks ago with Desmond Tutu's editor. He's sitting there telling me stories about Desmond Tutu and the only thing I'm thinking is, "Hmm, I wonder if he can get Desmond Tutu to endorse my next book." Sheesh, I am such a pig. So the editor and I were talking about Desmond Tutu and he mentioned how when apartheid was coming to an end in South Africa, the whites who had been in power, the Afrikaners who comprise about 10% of the population, were terrified the black South Africans would seek revenge and kill them. As you can imagine, after decades of brutal mistreatment, the desire for revenge was indeed strong, and likely would have happened had it not been for Desmond Tutu, the kind, brave Anglican archbishop, who traveled the nation speaking to vast audiences where he told them, "We are Christians. We are to forgive our enemies. The Afrikaners forgot what it meant to be Christian. Let us not forget." It is believed Desmond Tutu, perhaps more than anyone else, kept South Africa from plunging into a race war.

To hold someone *to* the Light is to hold them up to the Light of God's love, mercy, and justice when they are tempted to walk in darkness. It is not to scold or nag or condemn. It is simply to hold one another accountable to the Higher Light and Life to which all humans are called.

We hold others *in* the Light. We lift them up to the Light of God's Love and Goodness, when they are unable to lift themselves.

And we hold ourselves and others *to* the Light. We keep before them and ourselves a vision of the Grace and Forgiveness to which we all are called. We say, "Remember who we are. We are merciful, not vengeful. We are charitable, not intolerant. We are generous, not miserly. Even when others have forgotten what they are to be, let us not forget who we are to be."

We live in the Light.

We life and hold others in the Light.

We hold ourselves and others to the Light.