

"I flicker too much... "
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"Absence"
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Who invented the candle? Who invented a wick soaked in oil or animal fat contained by clay pot or shell? God bless light bringers. It is difficult for us moderns, given electric lights, to imagine lacking artificial light. Imagine being ruled by darkness.

One night along the coast of Maine, while visiting a friend, we needed to let our dog out. He refused to step off the porch. It was too dark. He feared what he couldn't see. Cliché' true, I held up my hand and couldn't see it. Spooky.

Soon darkness will begin to wax and increase, minute by minute. Earth'll do her orbital pirouette on Sunday, June 20, 11:32 PM, according to my trusty Farmer's Almanac. Solstice heralds Midsummer Night's Eve, twilight until dawn of June 24th, when faeries, revels, magic, romance, and dreams excite the imaginations of our human realm. Night bonfires were lit to ward off dragons. A night when we ask, as Shakespeare wrote, "Are you sure that we are awake?"

Fortunately, light prevails, when we choose to light the light, because darkness isn't the opposite of light. Darkness is the absence of light. We required only a small flashlight to dispel the Maine darkness and encourage our dog to do what he needed to do. Light overcomes every time, when we choose the light.

Summer solstice and winter solstice are the days when we notice this gift of light. Our church's house physicist once taught me aspects to the science of light. Every church ought to have a house physicist. Correct me, friends, where I misunderstood his lessons. Trust me, I often need correction. I get nervous when nobody disagrees with me; It means I'm not doing my job.

First lesson: we cannot touch light unless it is concentrated into a beam.

Second, neither can we see light. By the light source, which is separate from us, we see. Our retinas absorb the light that comes from the source – Sun, candle, light-bulb – for the sensation of sight. We see others because the light reflected by them enters our eye and is absorbed. We absorb your shine. It comes a certain relief to recognize that I am not the source. If I have any fire at all it is because of the Sun. Science affirms it: our Sun's energy is the source of all earthly light.

I'm not the source, I'm the reflector. A perfect reflector, a perfect mirror, will produce an image of the source with the same luminescence and magnitude as the source. A perfect mirror, alas, is imaginary, un-natural. So we natural ones muster up courage and faith to reflect as well as possible, given how smudgy, fractured, and dented we all are. Howsoever inadequate we may be, light still reflects. This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine.

The source is constant, we sure aren't. I flicker too much... I, mere candle, build up too much wax in my life and drown the flame. Nor do I particularly favor the unalterable fact that the price of being a candle is that I must melt; I must give up myself for this light to shine.

Darkness cannot snuff out the light. Impossible. Darkness lacks such capacity. But the stirring winds of hatred, negativity, callousness, they can gust and snuff out the flame. Our hurts, antagonisms, our teeth-clenched defensiveness can blow it out. So too our fears from risking to love, risking care, risking compassion, failing to forgive. So too our failure to walk in another's shoes and feel their hurt and loneliness, refusing to step out of ourselves and see the world from their eyes. Or then salty tears of sadness and loss drizzle upon flickering flame, leaving us both in the dark.

Only the absence of light keeps us in darkness. You know the drill. Hate isn't the opposite of love, it is the absence of love. Death isn't the opposite of life, it is the absence of life. Loneliness is the absence of community. Distrust is the absence of trust. Fear is the absence of faith. Hell is the absence of heaven. Evil is the absence of Godly goodness. The issue is: With what do we choose to fill the emptiness?

You cannot fight darkness with darkness, no more than anger can counter anger. I require the re-kindling that results when waxy me approaches the source and leans toward the fire. I must come to it. I must bend.

Funny thing about candles – they cannot light themselves.