

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS



A d v o c a c y a n d W i t n e s s P r o g r a m s

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EARTH HOUR ENERGY MEDITATION

Earth Hour occurs at 8:30 pm on the last Saturday in March. Earth Hour started in Sydney, Australia in 2007, when the city voluntarily turned off all non-essential lighting for one hour. The next year, Earth Hour went global with 435 cities participating in 35 countries. For Earth Hour 2009, 750 cities in 80 countries and counting have pledged to participate. Clearly the symbolic act of turning off our lights to show concern for our environment resonates deeply with people across the globe. Yet turning off our lights for one hour a year does not even put a dent in our energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. What is needed is a real, sustained change in the way that we live.

The UUA encourages Unitarian Universalists to participate in Earth Hour by using it as a time to reflect on energy justice – what is the real cost of the energy to power the lights that you normally have on during this hour?

Energy Facts for Reflection

- One 100 watt bulb uses 100 watt-hours per hour; 876 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year.
- About 55% of U.S. electricity is generated from burning coal.
- It takes 1.8 ounces of coal to power a 100 watt light bulb for an hour; 964 lbs of coal for a year.
- One pound of coal produces approximately 2.6 pounds of CO₂ gas when burned. That's 2,500 lbs of CO₂ generated to power one light bulb for one year.
- The U.S. produces about 1.5 billion tons of CO₂ from coal-burning power plants per year.
- Over 500 square miles of mountain ranges have been destroyed and over 1200 miles of streams have been buried by mountaintop removal coal mining.
- The U.S. consumes about 1.05 billion tons of coal each year. 2.9 million tons of coal per day - about 25 lbs per person per day.
- The most high-grade coal in the U.S. was created during the carboniferous era, 300 million years ago.

For Earth Hour

At 8:30 pm on March 28th, turn off all non-essential lights. Light a chalice (or candle).

Opening Reading:

May the light we now kindle
Inspire us to use our powers
To heal and not to harm
To help and not to hinder
To bless and not to curse
To serve you, Spirit of Life

(adapted from *Singing the Living Tradition*, reading number 453)

Guided Meditation:

Picture the light that you have just turned off.

Picture it connected via wiring to the other light bulbs, electrical outlets, appliances... in your home.

Follow the wiring out of your home, along the utility line, to the power lines outside. Feel the energy that is flowing, coursing, towards your home and your light, available with the flick of a switch.

Follow the transmission lines as they run for miles. Realize that not all of the energy traveling in those lines makes it to your home, some of it lost in friction... heat.

Follow the transmission lines.... all the way back to the power plant.

See the smoke pouring from the smokestacks. See that the smoke consists of: carbon dioxide which causes global warming, sulfur dioxide which causes acid rain, nitrogen oxide which causes smog, mercury, arsenic, and other poisonous metals.

See the water used to cool the power plant – thousands of gallons gushing by - heated by the burning coal and then dumped back into the water supply. Feel how the water by the plant is warmer than water elsewhere. Think about how that affects the plants and animals.

See the coal sludge – solid waste suspended in water to make a toxic slurry – stored precariously behind artificial dams. Remember that these dams have broken, burying the neighboring communities in toxic sludge.

Picture people living near the power plant – who lives there? What is in their drinking water? What is in their air? In the ground that children play on? Maybe it's your children.

Picture the coal being delivered to the power plant. Where does it come from?

Follow the trail in your mind to Appalachia. Picture entire mountain ranges removed in order to extract the low-grade coal below. Picture the debris that had been mountaintops being dumped into nearby streams. See the heavy metals and other poisons leaching out into the water supply. See what happens when it rains and there is no top soil and vegetation to hold the water. Hear the sound of the explosives used to blast off the mountain tops.

Picture people living here. What is in their drinking water? What is in their air? What would it be like to live there? Maybe you do live here.

Think about the coal within the mountain – how long it's been sitting there, and how it came to be there. Think of the plants and animals that lived 300 million years ago, their bodies first becoming peat, and then over the millennia turning to sedimentary rock... the coal that now powers your home.

Bring your mind back to where you are now. Know that all that you have seen and more is connected to the energy that will power the lights when you flip the switch in the room where you are sitting now. Energy extracted from what used to be the lifeblood of animals living 300 million years ago. Energy extracted from and refined in the neighborhoods of other humans living now. Precious energy.

Closing Reading:

I have come to terms with the future.
From this day onward I will walk easy on the earth.
Plant trees.
Live in harmony with all creatures, including my sisters and brothers.
I will restore the earth where I am.
Use no more of its resources than I need.
And listen, listen to what it is telling me.

(adapted from M.J. Slim Hooey's prayer, p. 109 in *Earth Prayers from Around the World*)

Questions for Further Reflection and Action

- Knowing how precious the energy is that powers your lights and appliances, what can you do to use less?
- Do you leave lights on that don't need to be on?
- Are there appliances that could be unplugged when not in use? (Even when turned off, appliances draw current if plugged in.) And what could you give away?
- Have you done an energy audit in your home? (More information at <http://www.energy.gov/>)
- What other ways can you use fewer resources?
- Can you act to end the practice of mountaintop removal coal mining? (<http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issues/environmentaljustice/129413.shtml>)