

Pet Remembrance Candle Lighting Ceremony©©
March 5, 2010

Remarks by Rev. Bonnie J. Berger

It is an honor to be here tonight to share with you the memories of our beloved animals and to celebrate the love, companionship, and joy they brought into our lives.

All of us here have been touched by the love of a pet. And all of us here have outlived that pet. And whether they left this earth last week, last month, last year, ten years ago, or even in our childhood, the loss can seem fresh, can evoke tears, and can bring a longing to our soul.

I remember well my childhood pet, a Seal Point Siamese cat named Ming Toi. I had her from when I was seven until I was 22. She was a delight! We had races in the backyard, I put streamers up in my bedroom to celebrate her birthday, and she even helped me get my Girl Scout badge in animal care. Perhaps, if there was such a thing, she should have received the Animal Scout badge in human care! For, I think you'd all agree, our animal companions take care of us in extraordinary ways.

We could all recite the cute, loving, amazing ways our animals touched our hearts... The always enthusiastic greeting when we walked in the door—even if we had only taken out the trash. The cuddles in bed. The crazy way they acted when high on catnip. The strange things that they ate—including our undergarments. The way they acted as our confidante, our sounding board, our friend, our faithful companion. In the complexities of life, our Creator made all of our lives just a bit easier and made our hearts just a bit bigger by bringing us our beloved pet.

Yet, we sometimes shake our fist at that same Creator and ask “why?” Why did she get

sick? Why did he wander away? Why didn't I have more resources to pay for her treatment? Why didn't I realize something was wrong? Why did she have to die so young and especially now? It is normal to ask these questions when we go through any loss. And what good is normalcy when our heart is breaking and the silence in the house is deafening?

I've come to adopt the philosophy that people and animals come into our lives for a reason. And I choose to believe that the reason is always one that has our highest good and growth in mind. And so it goes with a cat I had named Tabby. Actually she was my Mom's cat. And when my Mom died, Tabby and her pal Timmy went to live with a close friend of the family who had spent a great deal of time with them. After a few years this friend could no longer care for them, so they came to live with me. I felt like I had regained part of my Mom when they came into my home. They were a joy to have, even if they tormented the cat I already had. And, after another few years, Tabby became ill. The thought of losing her led to thoughts and memories of losing my Mom. Uh-oh I thought, this could really lead to a slippery downhill slope. You see, I took my Mom's death hard, and even though seven years had passed, I still experienced times of rawness. I thought to myself that I just couldn't go through that again. I needed to somehow reframe how I viewed losing Tabby. Now, I'm not a reverend for nothing. My faith and spiritual practice had a huge impact on how I moved through this time. And essentially what I did was to identify, acknowledge, and express gratitude for all of the love, joy, and delight that Tabby had brought into my life. I made the conscious choice to look at how Tabby had filled my heart and not how her loss would empty it. I'm going to repeat that: I made the conscious choice to look at how Tabby had filled my heart and not how her loss would empty it. Of course her passing hurt, and what I chose to focus on was the love. I believe she was an angel who came into my life to help me to learn other ways to deal with grief and loss. And for that, dear Tabby, I am eternally grateful.

Each of us has been forever changed by the love we gave and received from our pet--be they mammal, fish, fowl, reptile—or something else. And there are some people who simply don't understand how a pet impacts a life. How many of us have heard comments such as “It was just a pet for goodness sake” or “Just go get another one” or “I can't believe you are still crying about that cat/dog”? Yet those of us here tonight know the incredible connection and bond between humans and animals.

When you came in tonight you found an index card on your chair. I'd like us to take a moment now to think of the pet or pets that we have come here to remember. Write his or her name at the top of the card. Now close your eyes and bring them to mind. What was your day like with them—from the time you got up in the morning until the time you turned off the light to go to sleep? See them as healthy and vibrant. Now when you are ready I'd like you to write the answers to two questions on your card. Number 1: What one thing stands out about your pet that gave you absolute joy and delight? Write that under their name. Now, question Number 2: What do you want to thank your pet for? Underneath your first answer write “Thank you ____ for ...”

When we conclude here tonight, please place your card on the steps at the front of the room if you are comfortable so that all of us can share in your memory and in your gratitude. Let tonight be one of shared and collective memories of love, gratitude, and even healing.

The love of an animal is a love that gives without conditions. And love is the highest vibration in the Universe. So amazing.

In Judaism there is a tradition that when a person passes away members of the community say to them “may his or her memory be a blessing.” I think I can say

without reservation that for each of us, our pet's memory is indeed a blessing. May we find strength, comfort, peace, and joy in those memories.