There is a dearth of meaning in American life rooted in the lack of a story, a story that truly liberates the human from limited forms of identity, from seeing ourselves as mere consumers, or even as mere Americans (or any of the sub-identities within our nationalist identity)....

Americans tend to equate freedom with individualism and self-reliance. With that comes a mistaken notion that to be free is to be separate. But true freedom is found not in separation and self-interest, but in a vibrant interiority that thrives from increasing degrees of relationship.

The difficulty with this election was that people needed positive references to help guide them, not the destructive references of anger, hatred, and fear. Bernie Sanders represented a more positive reference and ignited passion in many people, but was smacked down by a dying system that was nevertheless still powerful enough to overcome his efforts. And of course cosmology—a functional story—and a sense of ourselves as an integral Earth community are positive references entirely absent from the electoral process.

I’ve woken many mornings since election night feeling that I cannot wake up from a nightmare that is too surreal to believe. And yet I have to believe it and confront it. It’s not only the threat Trumpism poses to the health of the planet. Hate crimes and racial incidents are widespread since his rise to power. The Ku Klux Klan is holding a celebration of his election. White supremacy groups feel like they have a new-found permission to fling their hatred into the world. Resentment and fear of women can now be expressed with impunity. Trump is the dying patriarchy laid bare. He epitomizes the fear of nature, the body, a united humanity, and the spirit. This is the ugliest America.

And yet...there is more underneath all of this...something to which I choose to adhere and that will eventually pull me out of my despair: in many ways, this election was less about ideas and issues than it was about a clash between paradigms, or essential world views. One is in ascendance, the other is dying. One goes toward the light, one is blinded by darkness. One believes in the future, one attaches itself desperately to demagogues who idealize the past.

Ideologies shift, they come and go. Political factions come and go. They are like the shadows of shadows, mirrors that rise up and break and fall away. What endures is a beacon of light that people either follow or not, either embrace or reject. That is where the real choice resides, not in seasonal picks between candidates that are lighter or darker shades of each other. When we make that choice, the work starts with ourselves. When we strengthen the positive references within ourselves, we also provide references for others in a confusing and chaotic time.

Choosing that beacon of light allows a person to speak with some authority and wisdom about what is of ultimate concern to all of the Earth community and what is our responsibility to safeguard and nourish in ourselves and others? So we should not be on the defensive or shy
about our vision of the future. It is those who adhere to the dying system who must defend their actions.

I have the image of fireflies. We are fireflies in the sense that we carry that beacon of light within us. We each have our own way of carrying our torch to provide people, and ourselves, with the references we need. The 2016 election has made it clear that it is all the more important for people of good faith to fill the airwaves and the town halls and the print media with messages that give people true references, ones that affirm life and the future. So the work continues and is even more important. People need something more to embrace than the empty promises of a demagogue. But if that is all that is offered, that becomes a more palatable choice than continued disaffection.

We are in a moment of destabilization. The infantile antics of people like Trump and his followers will cause suffering. They will cause destruction and a lot of noise. There will be losses to mourn. But they will not extinguish life and the evolution toward the beacon of light. Destabilization causes a void, and it is at these moments that something new will arise.