

Candles Cast a Healing Glow

Candles are our life preserver in troubled times. We burn them privately and publicly – in candlelight vigils and at memorial displays for the dead.

But what is this mystical power burning a candle possesses? Some of the attraction may be religious symbolism etched into our psyches by past experiences. Catholics kneel in front of rows of votive candles in red glass containers to pray for the sick or the deceased.

Jews light candles during Chanukah and a special candle every year on the anniversary of a loved one's death. And Buddhists light candles on leaves or paper boats and set them adrift in streams.

“Because candles are used in religion, it carries currency,” says Lynn Appleton, a professor in the sociology department at Florida Atlantic University. “When you light a candle, it's like a trigger and part of the reason why religious ritual works. They are reflective, spiritual and contemplative.”

And they are also our life preserver in troubled times.

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