



José Florencio F. Lapeña, Jr. MA, MD

Department of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery
College of Medicine, University of the Philippines Manila

Department of Otorhinolaryngology
Head and Neck Surgery
East Avenue Medical Center, Diliman, Quezon City

Liwanag sa Dilim: Days of Darkness, Night of Light!

*Light one candle for the strength that we need
To never become our own foe
And light one candle for those who are suffering
Pain we learned so long ago
Light one candle for all we believe in
That anger not tear us apart
And light one candle to find us together
With peace as the song in our hearts*

*Don't let the light go out!
It's lasted for so many years!
Don't let the light go out!
Let it shine through our hope and our tears.*

— Peter Yarrow (Peter, Paul and Mary) 1982¹

The Philippine elections of 2022 are over, and long before the official results were available (and despite the absence of an objectively credible count), presumptive winners were declared based on early returns.² A supposed majority of results claimed a landslide victory within hours (in a country with one of the slowest internet speeds in the world), even as voting was still taking place in some precincts (several continuing on to the next day, delayed by mechanical and electronic glitches and other issues).^{2,3} As the incredible outcome was broadcast and disseminated, millions of people reacted in disbelief and denial.^{2,4} Allegations of massive vote-buying and systematic manipulation, irregularities and fraud spread quickly amidst a growing groundswell of anger, as speculations and explanations were exchanged.^{4,5} The looming defeat of the leading (and sole, “last man standing is a woman”) lady contender, Vice President Ma. Leonor “Leni” Gerona Robredo, and inevitability of the return to power of the Marcoses in the person of Ferdinand “Bong-Bong” Romualdez Marcos Jr., son and namesake of the strongman ousted almost two score years ago, resulted in widespread despair and depression.^{2,5} Indeed, it seemed (at least to the former’s supporters) that the darkness had finally succeeded in blanketing out the light.

The previous months had seen a campaign period marked by the unprecedented rise of the biggest mass-based volunteer movement the country had ever seen.⁶ (Cf. <https://www.lenirobredo.com>) Without any funding of her own, Leni Robredo had kindled hope in the hearts of millions who rallied to her cause for good governance to achieve the upliftment of all (“*sa gobyernong tapat, angat buhay lahat*”), particularly the marginalized (“*mga nasa laylayan*”), heeding her admonition that it is more radical to love (“*mas radikal magmahal*”). Doctors and lawyers rendered free medical and legal assistance (the former continuing on from the pandemic response mobilized and supported by her Office of the Vice President). Artists composed songs (Cf. <https://open.spotify.com/artist/7see7cZi72xHqBahTEAqpt>) and created artworks, and volunteer-funded murals, posters and placards, t-shirts and pink paraphernalia blossomed everywhere. Even public transportation drivers gave free rides to fellow supporters who called each other “*kakampinks*” -- a combination of “*kakampi*” (meaning ally) and the pink color that came to identify the rose-colored tomorrow (“*kulay rosas ang bukas*”) that her supporters envisioned. People donated resources in cash and in kind, prepared pink porridge (“*lugaw*,”) pink bread (“*pan de sal*,”) even pink hard-boiled eggs and shared them with anyone and everyone, in house-to-house campaigns as well as in the campaign rallies that mobilized hundreds of thousands of supporters that trooped to venues on foot or whatever means possible (despite multiple obstacles including unannounced road closures and sudden unavailability of previously arranged transportation). These rallies saw modern-day multiplications of the loaves and fish, as participants brought food and drink to share under drenching rain or burning sun. They also reverberated with a spirit of kindness, camaraderie and mutual respect, with participants feeling safe and secure amidst self-policed ranks without needing external law enforcement. Moreover, rally sites were left as clean as they were before, the day after each gathering. Flash mobs and spontaneous events sprung up in multiple places, as Leni managed to visit every province in the country, including vote-poor areas never before visited by any presidential candidate. A pink tsunami loomed on the horizon from north to south, sweeping east to west as more and more like-minded people witnessed to the message of hope.⁶ Indeed, these

Correspondence: Prof. Dr. José Florencio F. Lapeña, Jr.
Department of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery
Ward 10, Philippine General Hospital
Taft Avenue, Ermita, Manila 1000
Philippines
Phone: (632) 8554 8467
Telefax: (632) 8524 4455
Email: lapenajf@upm.edu.ph, jflapena@up.edu.ph

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were moments of light - providing a foretaste of and bearing witness to the possibility of a better future.

Suddenly, these hopes seemed dashed to the ground with the resounding victory of the Marcos camp and their powerful propaganda machine that had systematically spewed massive misinformation and disinformation in the decades of calculated preparation for their return to rule over the country they had once been forced to flee in exile.⁷ It culminated in a blitzkrieg barrage that was a naked “in your face” flaunting of lies and falsehood over truth and justice, of thievery and plunder over honest labor and hard work, of wealth, entitlement and wanton excess over diligent study, legitimate qualifications⁸ and dutiful payment of due taxes.⁹ Indeed, the triumph of the untouchable convict made it seem that it was “better to cheat than to repeat” reinforcing the golden rule as those who had the gold made the rules. In the words of a young academic, “what our youth bitterly learned, unfortunately, is that goodness doesn’t always win, at least not in each battle... why should they work hard on their studies when apparently qualifications don’t matter? Why should they practice honesty when dishonesty helps you win?”⁵ For those who quixotically fought for the right, the dismal days after the elections were days of darkness indeed.

And then a thanksgiving rally dubbed “we are the light” (“*Tayo Ang Liwanag*”) was convened just four days after the elections, where Leni acknowledged the collective grief, hurt and anger, then turned it around completely. Allow me to paraphrase and translate:¹⁰

Affirming these knotted-up, deep-seated pent-up emotions and even soaking in them can allow listening to your heart of hearts - and remembering that this is what it really feels like to love. Remember that there was good that blossomed within each one - and that the rage we feel is rooted in love. We reached out to others, listened to them, helped them and promoted our vision in the past months, not to gather votes, but to value and uplift every Filipino. Regardless of who they were supporting. Regardless of who they voted for.

While unanswered questions should be answered and allegations addressed, we have to begin accepting results that differ from those we dreamed of and hoped for. The wrongdoings did not just take place on election day (in the form of broken vote counting machines or alleged vote-buying). The biggest adversary predated the polls, a powerful, vast machinery developed over decades with the capacity to sow disinformation and spread anger. It stole the truth, and therefore stole history, as well as the future. Disinformation is one of our biggest foes. Although systematic lying may prevail now, only we can say until when it will reign. It is up to us, whether the fight is over or just beginning.

She then promised to devote her energy to fighting falsehood, inviting us to join her in a movement that would defend truth and explain how disinformation

was spread, why it was believed in, and who was behind it. So that we do not lose the spirit behind the movement, that the aim of a faithful government is the upliftment of everyone’s life (“*sa gobyernong tapat; angat buhay lahat*”), she announced the launching of an **Angat Buhay NGO** (literally, **Lift Life NGO**) and invited all to continue working together in the largest volunteer network in the history of our nation:¹⁰

And as we continue reaching out to the marginalized, and contribute so that they can rise up, we must not choose who to help or turn our back on anyone as we demonstrate the full force of radical love (“*radikal na pagmamahal*”). Our challenge is to move forward arm in arm to realize the aspiration that bound us together: One nation that is humane, truthful, and just, where government is accountable and no one is left behind in the fringes. So many are still grieving and sad, and hearts and minds are wrapped in gloom. Your feelings are real, and important. But I have learned in such difficult times, that healing will not happen in solitude and sulking, but in resuming service to others, with eyes fixed on the horizon. Allow yourself to weep, but when you are ready to dry your tears, shake it off and strengthen your heart - because we have work to do.

I am excited now, excited to continue to strive together with you. And I say to all: hope continues, there is still light. That light was not snuffed out in the elections, rather it grew brighter. How much further can we reach if we do not give up? Let us use the coming days, months and years to advance the Philippines we dream of. I repeat: nothing was wasted, we were not defeated. The eyes that have been opened will not be shut again!

She ended by asking people to hug one another, as this day was not an ending, but the beginning of a new chapter – one that we would write together. As we lit up one another’s paths, so would we light up the lives of many others. In one speech on that May evening, a speech that reverberated throughout the country, she rekindled hope and brought light in the darkness. She magically and brilliantly transformed the preceding days of darkness and depression into one night of light!

What is the memory that’s valued so highly
That we keep it alive in that flame?
What’s the commitment to those who have died
That we cry out they’ve not died in vain?
We have come this far always believing
That justice would somehow prevail
This is the burden, this is the promise
This is why we will not fail!

Don’t let the light go out!
Don’t let the light go out!
Don’t let the light go out!

— Peter Yarrow (Peter, Paul and Mary) 1982¹

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