

2012 Burning Bowl

Happy New Year! This has been a very unusual holiday season with Christmas and New Year's Day falling on a Sunday. Today we will celebrate with our traditional Burning Bowl service. I say traditional because it is the one ritual or tradition that seems to be uniquely Unity and the one ritual that Unity wants to claim. You may find that Unity congregations resist many rituals and traditions found in Christian churches. Some find rituals without meaning and some find them fraught with hurtful and painful meanings. We forget that we are the meaning makers and we can give a ceremony whatever meaning we want. Still, Unity's tradition is a Burning Bowl service as part of the New Year celebration or as part of a healing and forgiveness ceremony.

Embarking upon a cleansing ritual as part of a new beginning is not unique to Unity. Easter is really the beginning of the new year in the Christian church calendar. Lent, the time between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday is a time of preparation and atonement. In *Keep A True Lent*, Charles Fillmore says this about the ashes of Ash Wednesday: "Ashes symbolize repentance. Repentance means denial; it is a relinquishment and should be made without too much vehemence. Therefore, I deny out of consciousness old error thoughts, as if I were gently sweeping away cobwebs, and I affirm positively and fearlessly that I am a child of God, and that my inheritance is from God."

We gently sweep out the cobwebs that have collected and make clear the way for new ideas and a new consciousness of our true nature as a child of God. Lent gives us 40 days for this process. In the Jewish tradition there are 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In indigenous cultures there may be fire rituals around the new or the full moon. I think the Burning Bowl is an attempt to create a sacred ritual that coincides with the secular calendar rather than a religious day or cycle in nature. And because we give the meaning to whatever we create, it is a wonderful opportunity for us to evaluate the past year and embark upon the adventure of a new year.

Every year we come to this place of ending and beginning as a new person. No matter how eventful or uneventful we may consider the last 365 days, we have had a year of experiences and thoughts and relationships that have shaped us. We have lost cells and generated new cells and many of us have lost or gained inches in height and/or circumference. So as we stand here at the

very first day of 2012, who are we and, perhaps just as importantly, who do we want to be?

“*Who are we*” invites us to consider the events of the past year and the thoughts and beliefs we hold about ourselves and our world. What has happened in your life this past year and what thoughts or beliefs do you hold about those events and about yourself? Generally we tend to divide events into good, bad and indifferent. When something happens that we consider good, we tend to think positively about ourselves and our world. Life is abundant and we have important gifts and talents to contribute. When something happens that we consider bad, we tend to think negatively about ourselves and our world. The world is a place of evil and lack and we are lacking, without the ability to be or do what it is we desire. And when life gets boring, we quit thinking about it and just take what comes. This is really kind of a powerless way to live life. What if life isn’t happening TO us but rather our experience arises out of us. Life will go on. People will die and be born; the weather will by turns be delightful and disastrous; we will have opportunities in every day. Our experience arises out of us; out of how we respond to the world and what we believe about ourselves. What if we have been living life backwards--believing our thoughts are formed by our experiences when really, our experiences are formed by our thoughts! It is a fundamental teaching of Unity and yet it is so easy to get confused about.

Let’s take any event that has happened in the past year. Try something not overwhelming if possible. Now, as you think about that event, whether it is something you feel positively or negatively about, what beliefs do you have about yourself and the world when you think about that event?

Take a calming breath and consider the possibility that you had that belief already and it was **that belief** that shaped your experience of the event. Is it a belief that serves you well, that is a foundation for a positive 2012 or is it a belief that you are ready to release so that you can create new experiences in 2012?

This is how the second question leads us forward. *Who do we want to be?* What qualities in ourselves do we want to cultivate and support to create the life we desire in 2012?

As I was preparing for this talk, I was reading Emilie Cady's *Lessons In Truth*.

There was a quote in the beginning that caught my attention: "We have come to a place now where our search for Truth must no longer be for the rewards; it must no longer be our seeking a creed to follow, but it must be our living a life."

As I contemplate 2012, the question is not about what goals I need to set or what I need to acquire or what books and classes I need to change something about myself. The question is simply "How do I want to live my life?" Then of course is the follow-up, "OK, what's stopping you?" No matter what it is that I desire for myself or for the world, what is in the way begins with me. I am held back by my own beliefs and thoughts.

In today's Burning Bowl we have the opportunity to discard those thoughts and beliefs from 2011 that keep us from living the life we desire in 2012. In *Keep A True Lent*, Charles Fillmore says, "The Fire of God (Holy Spirit) is the Word of God in action. It burns out the dross of negation in consciousness, and reveals Christ. Tongues of fire represent the illumination of thought, in demonstration of Spirit's presence and power. The flame of fire symbolizes the light of intuition that burns in our hearts."

The light of intuition is always aflame in our hearts, ready to burn away the error thoughts and allow the power and presence of Spirit in us to be revealed in greater and greater degrees. With every challenge and every self-discovery we reveal more of our own God-created magnificence.

We are going to take some time in meditation and I invite you to consider how you'd like to live your life in 2012. Then write down the thoughts and beliefs you need to stop giving power to and release them into the nothingness out of which they arise. You were not created to be fearful or limited or living in lack. You are God's beloved and that which is of God is your inheritance. There is no power in the world or in others that is greater than the One Power and One Presence which you have constant access to. If you are to live from this truth, what contrary beliefs will you release? Please write what you release on the special paper you were given so that all our error thoughts will disappear easily. If you need paper, please raise your hand and an usher will bring you a piece of paper.

At the end of our time of meditation I'll invite you to come and cast your paper into the bowl at the front as we allow the flame to burn away the dross of negativity and reveal the truth of our being. So that we always have something positive when we create an open space, please take an angel card from the basket as you let go of your paper. This may guide you in a focus or potentiality for the coming year.

Let us take just a moment to relax and become still. Breathe gently as you consider how you'd like to live your life in 2012 and what error thoughts and beliefs you'd like to release to live more fully in the truth of your being.