

## 2019 White Stone

Here we are, perched at the very beginning of another year. How does it feel? Does it feel new or different? As I wrote in the Wednesday email this past Wednesday, the sense of new-ness really has to come from our consciousness. How things unfold for us as the calendar pages continue to move is really more about our consciousness than about our location, our vocation or our relationships on earth. Because consciousness is our relationship with the Divine. How we engage in and perceive our relationship with the One Power shapes all our other experiences. So what is the point of the White Stone?

Do you have a stone and a pencil? The ushers can bring the basket if you need to select your stone. Feel it in your hand. Feel the weight and texture of it. Notice the fine, white dust that gets on your hands. The stones come from JerUSAlem Stone which is a company based in Kansas City. But the stone isn't from Kansas or Missouri. It is from quarries between Hebron and Bethlehem in Israel. Stone from the ground where Jesus walked with his disciples and his family. The owner of the company is Sam Nachum, who was born in the mountains near Jerusalem. At the age of 18 he met a foreign exchange student named Dana, who was from Kansas City. Despite spoken language barriers, they found the language of love. They wrote to each other after Dana returned to this country and after serving his time in the Israeli army, he bought a one-way ticket to Kansas City. Not overnight but eventually, Sam learned the language and married Dana. He initially did house renovations but a serious health challenge sidelined that career. And during his time of healing over several years, he had the idea to bring the stone from his country here. He started his company in 1995 and most of the stone is for large projects in houses: countertops, tile flooring and such. In 1990 Reverend David Williamson from Unity in Hollywood Florida developed a white stone ceremony. And since 1997, Sam Nachum's company has been supplying ceremonial stones, including those we hold right here, for Unity and spiritual services anyone can hold.

Did you know that in Jesus' time, people who were released from prison were given a white stone as a symbol of their freedom? Here we are, claiming our freedom from the past, embarking on the first steps of a journey through this calendar year. The Burning Bowl ceremony is about casting aside the error thoughts that have weighed us down. The White Stone ceremony is about claiming and believing in the unseen possibilities that fill each moment.

The White Stone ceremony is based on the scripture of Revelations 2:17.

Most people tend to shy away from Revelations. A message of the end of times and some pretty gory language. No one really knows who wrote the book of Revelations. It is usually attributed to the apostle John, who wrote the book of John. Modern scholars doubt anyone in Jesus time wrote this book but it was the alleged authorship by John that got Revelations canonized into the New Testament. Most agree the book is Apocalyptic. This does NOT **just** mean “the end of time” as is a common usage. The Greek roots of the word mean “a disclosure of knowledge” or a “lifting of a veil”. The apocalyptic writings in the Jewish and Christian tradition are symbolic and filled with cloaked metaphors. So it is up to us to discern the meaning being revealed to us.

The second chapter of Revelations, however, is not so much about the end of time as a series of messages to early church communities. First a message to Ephesus, then Smyrna and the passage we read is directed to the community in Pergamum. The messages were each a combination of chastising and encouraging. In the Metaphysical Bible Dictionary, Unity co-founder Charles Fillmore addresses this passage in Revelations and tells us that Pergamum represents “the intellectual consciousness in man”. We have hopefully learned that the intellect is not all good or bad—it depends on how it is directed.

The passage to Pergamum begins in the 12th verse and starts out noting they have faced challenges with faith. Good for them! Then the author takes them to task for continuing to worship the pagan god Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitans. This was a time of transition for the early Gentile church communities as they tried to separate themselves from the traditions of their past, including the worship of multiple pagan gods. Revelation’s author refers to this as living “where Satan’s throne is”. Fillmore refers to this throne of Satan, the adversary, as “adverse mind or that which thinks and acts independently of God mind.”

So Pergamum is invited to repent or to change their thinking. The pagan gods represent those worldly issues that capture our attention and divide our mind between Truth and . . .whatever else we believe holds our good—the economy, a guru or a leader, a relationship. Then comes the passage which is the basis of the White Stone ceremony.

*Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.*

Jesus has several references to “ears to hear”. One challenge when we want to share the good news of our spiritual understanding is that not everyone hears our words or our experience the way we do. When new people visit Unity for the first time if they have the ears to hear the message they report “It feels like coming home.” They embrace the idea of the divine within all; the idea of personal power and free will; the idea of personal responsibility and freedom. Some who come do not have the ears yet. They hear something so foreign and frankly frightening that they close down, quit listening and move away. And we bless them, know that Spirit is with them and we see them supported in ways that make sense to them. But if we have ears and are able to hear Spirit, what comes next?

*To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna.* What are we conquering? Given the context of the message, I go back to the challenge faced by Pergamum and still by us today—the divided mind. The division within our mind that pits believing in God as our Source against looking to channels in the material world as the ultimate yet temporary source of our good. The division within our hearts that pits our sense of spiritual Oneness against all the labels of separation we paint onto our world, isolating ourselves. To conquer may not be to completely vanquish the thoughts and feelings of our divided humanity but to gain the awareness that allows us to make choices. Maybe the thoughts still come up but we choose to deny them power.

In the Revealing Word, Fillmore says, “[Manna] represents the realization that the divine substance is everywhere present, in every part of the consciousness.” Everywhere present, in every moment; available no matter where our thoughts might be. In 2 Esdras in the Apocrypha, manna is referred to as “the bread of angels”. I love the image that Spirit gives us ideas and substance which is “the bread of angels.”

Not only are we given substance sufficient for where we are right now, Revelations says, “*and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.*”

In the Bible, name changes are symbolic of changes in consciousness. Saul to Paul, Sarai to Sarah, Abram to Abraham. Are you ready to claim a new consciousness and a greater awareness in 2019? Today is Epiphany, Three Kings Day in some cultures. It represents the day the wise men brought gifts to honor the Christ.

If Christmas symbolizes the birth and rebirth of the Christ consciousness in us, then Epiphany symbolizes our awakening to the gifts of our divinity. The 12 days of Christmas have been celebrated with the 12 spiritual powers in Daily Word this year.

Fillmore refers to the white stone as representing our spiritual faculty of faith, the rock and foundation of our daily lives lived in the consciousness of our divinity and our oneness. Feel the stone in your hand. Remind yourself of the eternal nature of Spirit and your ability to build a life upon faith in Divine Source. We're going to take a moment to become quiet and listen for the still small voice that speaks from within us. Listen for a word that is your new name being revealed. The name that is revealed is unique to you. It is your guidance. It is spirit speaking through your heart and whispering a word, a name that will inspire how you are shaping your life right now. Why do we do these rituals and ceremonies every year? Because where you are right now is different than where you were last year or 10 years ago. All the experiences of 2018 have been added to your awareness and so this ceremony is different than last year and next year will be different again.

Whether this is your first visit to Unity or you have attended for years, I invite you this day to open your heart and mind to a new understanding of your divinity. I invite you into a new relationship with the bread of angels that is available to sustain you every day. I invite you into the freedom spiritual power brings you as you rise above the snares of our temporary conditions. And I invite you into the responsibility spiritual power brings as you discern how to create for the highest good of all.

As we prepare to open our hearts and minds in meditation I want to say a couple things about the name being revealed.

Names in biblical times were representative of characteristics; things in the material world as well as abstract and spiritual concepts. So the word that comes to you may not be what you think of as a name. It is more likely a word. Trust the word. The word may seem odd or may be something everything within you resists. Trust the word. If the clever intellect in you is trying to be in control, you may find yourself trying to choose a different word you like and yet hearing a word over-riding it. Trust the word. On more than one—thousand—occasions I have tried to resist the call of Spirit. With the pencil, write the word on your stone and trust the word. Keep it with you and take it out from time to time. Ponder the energy and guidance of your word and stay curious about what Spirit reveals this year.

And now let us go within. When you have your word, write it on the stone.

Now I want us to claim the new possibilities of 2019. Take out the sheet of paper. Using your new name, at the top write “Dear \_\_\_\_\_” Now, I want you to write yourself a letter outlining what Spirit wants for you in this new year. Let it flow from the foundation of faith knowing that everything is possible. Affirming that the entire Universe loves and supports you and wants everything good for you, write down what Spirit wants for you in 2019.

Put your letter in the envelope and seal it. Write your new name and today's date on the envelope. Put it someplace you can find it. Next year, on New Year's Eve, open it. See how much of what is possible you claimed and what was for your highest and best.