

This is love's hearth, the home of hope,  
a refuge for minds in search of truth  
unfolding, ever beautiful, ever strange.

Here, compassion is our shelter,  
freedom our protection  
from the storms of bigotry and hate.

In this abode, may we find comfort and courage.  
Here may our sight become vision  
to see the unseen,  
to glimpse the good that is yet to be.

### **Sermon/ New Year Meditation part #1**

New Year marks a time of transition. We are passing through a portal or doorway...that separates us from the past and urges us to walk forward into the unknown future with some measure of hope and commitment ...to begin anew.

We seem to have a built in fundamental impulse for hope that lingers deep in the heart and mind...beneath all our glitter and go...It calls us forward ...challenging our capacity to find or create greater wholeness in ourselves and in the larger world.

If we do make New Year "resolutions" or "affirmation", we may not take the time to cultivating and nurturing the change of heart and mind necessary to prepare for real transitions take root. Too often our best intentions fail...and by Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> we have forgotten our resolve for change or growth.

Many people are now choosing to begin the new year by going on a spiritual retreat...

Some go by way of spa/retreat centers..others...carved out time and space at home or in nature....

And others create a time out....a Sabbath moment in worship...to venture forward to name what is most sacred and dedicate ourselves anew to manifest our hearts and minds deepest desires in large ways and small in the start of the new year.

1

Inagual Poem by Maya Angelo-Divided into 4 parts; each part with accompany story or reading to create a series of thresholds...to invite each one of us to consider passage from where we are to where we might be and become in the new year.

A Rock, A River, A Tree  
Hosts to species long since departed,  
Marked the mastodon.

The dinosaur, who left dry tokens  
Of their sojourn here  
On our planet floor,  
Any broad alarm of their hastening doom  
Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.

But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,  
Come, you may stand upon my  
Back and face your distant destiny,  
But seek no haven in my shadow.

I will give you no more hiding place down here.

You, created only a little lower than  
The angels, have crouched too long in  
The bruising darkness,  
Have lain too long  
Face down in ignorance.

Your mouths spilling words  
Armed for slaughter.

The Rock cries out today, you may stand on me,  
But do not hide your face.

2

Threshold #1-Story from Tapestry of Faith: What Moves Us-  
nor unknown [www.uua.org/tapestry](http://www.uua.org/tapestry) of faith

### A Lonely Soul in Community

"Several years ago, I spent an evening discussing Covenant Groups with members of a New England church who were interested in starting a small group ministry program. Part of my ministry is dedicated to helping congregations start and sustain small group ministries of six to twelve persons who meet regularly as a spiritually empowering practice."

"At the end of my formal remarks, I asked the members of the audience if they might be willing to simply get together in small groups over a meal and talk about their ( need )for community in their church."

One of the most respected elder statesmen of the church stood up and slowly walked to the front of the assembly, faced his fellow congregants and said he was interested in joining such a group.

He had wanted something like this for years, he said, because he was lonely.

"I do not have any friends," he finally confessed. Waves of shock rolled through the gathering. How could *he* be lonely? He was a revered and beloved member of the congregation, a pillar of the church. Many persons expressed incredulity.

When the group quieted down, the man spoke again, saying "Every man in this room who is my age knows what I am talking about. Our social upbringing has taught us not to talk about our feelings.

We are not supposed to be emotionally vulnerable or close to anyone except our (partners)."Something happened to me as he spoke. I felt the man's vulnerability. I could feel his vulnerability because his heart spoke the hidden language of my own heart: loneliness. My own social upbringing had taught me *not* to talk about my feelings to anyone. I had learned to be emotionally invulnerable and closed to everyone. But now, here, in the midst of this gathered community—someone so much like my self—had stepped forward and said "I'm lonely."

He did not step forward as an authority figure, or as someone whose racial identity or class status was at issue. He stepped forward to talk about his own unmet needs for intimacy.

His story was my story. My story was his story. He had heard a call and he responded.

All of us in the room were now in the presence of an open space, an opened heart, a change of heart; a call for healing that could be performed only by a religious community because human salvation is not a solo act.

3

Together, we loved this man beyond belief, beyond our own mistaken ideas and thoughts about who he is. Together, we had created an ethos of care and compassion in which we could simply love him.

I call this atmosphere of care and compassion created by religious community the second major element of personal experience for us as Unitarian Universalists."

Moment for silent, personal reflection:

In each of us there remains some deeper yearning

we hope to nourish when we join in religious community.

When we are able to name and claim these things for ourselves we will be

Able to respond as the beloved community we hope to be.

Please take this time to get in touch with your most inner hope and desire as you

bring yourself to the threshold of this ministry and this new year.

4

Part # 2 (Inaugural Poem by Maya Angelo)

Across the wall of the world,  
A River sings a beautiful song,  
Come rest here by my side.

Each of you a bordered country,  
Delicate and strangely made proud,  
Yet thrusting perpetually under siege.

Your armed struggles for profit  
Have left collars of waste upon  
My shore, currents of debris upon my breast.

Yet, today I call you to my riverside,  
If you will study war no more. Come,

Clad in peace and I will sing the songs  
The Creator gave to me when I and the  
Tree and the stone were one.

Before cynicism was a bloody sear across your  
Brow and when you yet knew you still  
Knew nothing.

The River sings and sings on.

There is a true yearning to respond to  
The singing River and the wise Rock.

So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew

The African and Native American, the Sioux,  
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek  
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheikh,  
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,  
The privileged, the homeless, the Teacher.

5

### "The Soup Kitchen Door"

"Weeks of preparation brought us to this moment. We had the recipe in advance. We knew what to do. Ingredients we generously given over to our teens Together, they made the soup From our offerings..Warm crock pots of soup waited while we sang Come ye thankful people come. Baskets of corn, potato, onions and pumpkin were brought forward by our youngest A visual reminder of our abundance and capacity to share... When the last thanksgiving song was sung, we were took our place in line. Waiting in an imperfect silence....we were to contemplate the life of the homeless man, women or child; To stand in their shoes and see through their eyes, if for only a while...to wait as all those who suffer life on the streets wait everyday and every night. While everyone ate, Its hard to say how many of us really passed through the doors of our soup Kitchen experience that day...all I know...is that when I left For home, my belly full of warm vegetable soup and home-made bread.. I felt nearer to others and the pulse of a life beyond my own... As the question of what to do stayed on my mind and heart.  
-story by Rev. Lori Staubitz...

*"the unfolding of the soul is an increase in relationality and engagement. The more the soul has unfolded, the more the person is making it a priority to "improve the neighborhood," and to find meaning in life in relationships and in creativity and in activism. Our interest in spirituality and social justice is present in the wholeness of our own heritage, which holds these two together in an integrated way. The illuminated, unfolded soul is a presence of creativity and blessing and engagement in the world."*

- Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker; Star King Theological School

### Reflection # 2

How has your life grown or expanded as a result of being with this congregation?  
(Participating in worship, social justice outreach and membership responsibilities?)  
What experiences have been challenging or unexpected? How would you like to grow  
In relationship this congregation to enrich your life and the life of this community?

Part # 3 (Inaugural Poem by Maya Angelo)

They hear. They all hear  
The speaking of the Tree.

Today, the first and last of every Tree  
Speaks to humankind. Come to me, here beside the River.

Plant yourself beside me, here beside the River.

Each of you, descendant of some passed  
On traveler, has been paid for.

You, who gave me my first name, you  
Pawnee, Apache and Seneca, you  
Cherokee Nation, who rested with me, then  
Forced on bloody feet, left me to the employment of  
Other seekers--desperate for gain,  
Starving for gold.

You, the Turk, the Swede, the German, the Scot ...  
You the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru, bought  
Sold, stolen, arriving on a nightmare  
Praying for a dream.

Here, root yourselves beside me.

I am the Tree planted by the River,  
Which will not be moved.

I, the Rock, I the River, I the Tree  
I am yours--your Passages have been paid.

Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need  
For this bright morning dawning for you.

7

**THE FOLLOWING NOTES ARE FROM A RECENT TRANSCRIPT FROM NPR "SPEAKING OF FAITH"-INTERVIEW OF JOHN O'DONAHUE BY HOST KRISTA TIPPETT. FALL '09**

"The Inner Landscape of Beauty"

O'Donohue was beloved for his book *Anam ?ara*, Gaelic for "soul friend," and for his insistence on beauty as a human calling and a defining aspect of God.

Mr. John O'Donohue: "Your identity is not equivalent to your biography. There is a place in you where you have never been wounded, where there's a seamlessness in you, and where there is a confidence and tranquility in you, and I think the intention of prayer and spirituality and love is now and again to visit that inner kind of sanctuary.

Landscape" is a really pivotal word, not just in describing the natural world but an important word in talking about how human beings know themselves and move through the world.

I think it makes a huge difference when you wake in the morning and come out of your house. Whether you believe you are walking into dead geographical location, which is used to get to a destination, or whether you are emerging out into a landscape that is just as much, if not more, alive as you but in a totally different form. And if you go towards it with an open heart and a real watchful reverence, that you will be absolutely amazed at what it will reveal to you. And I think that was one of the recognitions of the Celtic imagination: that landscape wasn't just matter, but that it was actually alive. What amazes me about landscape, landscape recalls you into a mindful mode of stillness, solitude, and silence where you can truly receive time.

We are always actively involved in receiving and shaping, (our reality) "

"Possibility is the secret heart of time."

" I think when you begin to get a sense of the depth that is there then your whole heart wakens up. You know, I mean, I love Irenaeus' thing from the second century, which said, the Glory of the human being — "The glory of God is the human being fully alive." And I think in our culture that one of the things that we are missing is that these thresholds where we can encounter this, and where we move into new change in our lives, there are no rituals to help us to recognize them or to cross them worthily."

8

"I think that the threshold, if you go back to the etymology of the word "threshold," it comes from "threshing," which is to separate the grain from the

husk. So the threshold, in a way, is a place where you move into more critical and challenging and worthy fullness.

I think a threshold is a line which separates two territories of spirit, and I think that very often how we cross is the key thing."

Questions for our New Year's Reflection:

ODonahue's ideas of landscape and our ability to create beauty anew are foundational to spiritual transformation. How are the interplay of outer landscape and your

Inner sense of spirituality related? What new creation is arising in you?

(perhaps as a desire to deepen your relationships, embody greater accountability, integrity, trust or action.....)

Take a moment to reflect upon what beauty is arising in you in the dawn of this new year.

9

Part #4 (Inaugural Poem by Maya Angelo)

History, despite its wrenching pain,  
Cannot be unlived, and if faced  
With courage, need not be lived again.

Lift up your eyes upon  
The day breaking for you.

Give birth again  
To the dream.

Women, children, men,  
Take it into the palms of your hands.

Mold it into the shape of your most  
Private need. Sculpt it into  
The image of your most public self.  
Lift up your hearts  
Each new hour holds new chances  
For new beginnings.

Do not be wedded forever  
To fear, yoked eternally  
To brutishness.

The horizon leans forward,  
Offering you space to place new steps of change.  
Here, on the pulse of this fine day  
You may have the courage  
To look up and out upon me, the  
Rock, the River, the Tree, your country.

10

### **"A Theology of Power in Ministry by Rev. Gordon McKeeman**

paper presented for the UU Harper's Ferry Study Group, Nov 2000

"The impulse toward wholeness is what I count on in the quest for power to accomplish something. This impulse has been called the soul, the holy spirit, the inner light. It is what I address in sermons. I try to summon the awareness of it to consciousness. Some don't remember its presence without some prompting."

I seek to help people realize that the religious community's health and their own are intimately connected, and that their contribution to it of time, talent and self, are for their own welfare."

"We have the responsibility to lead the religious institution (the church) in becoming a source of power. We are called to do this in the midst of a group of people overwhelmingly devoted to individualism, and consequently suspicious of institutions.

"Our own self-interest requires us to make commitments on behalf of our growth, maturity, well-being, in a word, our wholeness or (to use a religious word) holiness.

"Every gain, every time a person takes on step toward a more inclusive self, learning to love one more person, understands his/her well-being as inextricably bound to that other and is committed to that other's health and well-being, is an increase in the power of the church to fulfill its mission of universal salvation."

Adaptation of Inaugural poem by Maya Angelo: Lines omitted for delivery purposes:

"No less to Midas than the mendicant.  
No less to you now than the mastodon then."

Each one of us stands before the threshold of this moment.

We bring all of who we are to bear upon all that we will be.

What failings and suffering will we leave behind to make room for change...

In the hope that we will participate in the great unfolding of life.

What commitments will we make to ourselves and others that might make all

The difference .....

What do we carry forward and what are we willing to leave behind ?

Part # 5- Inaugural Poem by Maya Angelo

"Here on the pulse of this new day  
(May you) have the grace to look up and out  
And into your sister's eyes, into  
Your brother's face, your country  
And say simply  
Very simply  
With hope  
Good morning."-

Hymn "Morning Has Broken"