

“Out with the Old, in with the New”
A New Year’s Day Service
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Poconos
January 1, 2017

Mark Twain once said that New Year’s “is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual.” Most people who make resolutions don’t end up keeping them. So should we forget about making resolutions? Well, we might want to consider reframing the idea of resolutions.

The beginning of a new year is a natural time to take stock of the previous year and look ahead to the coming one. It’s an ancient tradition, and a pretty universal one. January is named after the Roman god, Janus, whose two faces looked both to the past and the future, symbolizing the focus of the New Year’s festival: to reflect on events of the past year, and to make plans for the days and months ahead.

By taking a little time to think about the past year and what its high points were, what was challenging, what we learned about ourselves and about the world, how we grew and changed, what we may have lost, what we gained – we can set a direction for ourselves, and if we want to, set some spiritual and personal goals.

I think most people set the bar too high when it comes to resolutions. But the idea of setting attainable goals, having a focus for the coming year, is a healthy one. It can help us feel more in charge of our lives and that we’re moving in a positive direction.

Guided meditation, remembering the past year

Questions for reflection and discussion

What were your happiest times? What made them happy?

Who were the beings –human or otherwise— in your life this past year that brought you joy and happiness, or fulfillment, enjoyment?

What difficulties and challenges did you go through?

Who helped you through a tough time?

Let's take a moment to think about those who enriched our lives over the last year, and silently thank them, feel gratitude for their presence in our lives.

What's something you learned about yourself? Maybe something about your needs, your passions, your personality... How can you honor this new knowledge about yourself in the coming year?

What's one thing that worked well for you last year? Do you want to make a commitment to continue that thing? How will you do that?

What's one thing that didn't work for you last year? Do you want to change that thing? How will you do that?

Think of one quality about yourself that you'd like to work on. Do you want to become more patient? Kinder? Focus more on the positive? Whatever it is, write it down. And try to phrase it in the positive. Instead of saying, "I want to stop being so critical of others," you might say, "I want to make a habit of finding complimentary things to say to the people around me."

Now, here are three "blue sky" questions. A "blue sky" question is one where we don't place any limits on ourselves.

1. If you were absolutely unafraid, what would you try to do?
2. What silly or just fun things would you like to do?
3. What new things would you like to learn?

Questions for Discussion

Thinking over the past year, what are some things that you would like less of this year?

What are some things you'd like more of?

If you were to come up with one word or short phrase to inspire you for the coming year, what would it be?

Setting Our Intentions and Ritual

Now, I'm going to hand out some small pieces of paper. On the gray one, I'll invite you to write down one or more things that you'd like to let go of, to leave in the past. On the green one, I'll invite you to write down one or more things you'd like to carry forward into this new year. It can be something that you want to continue, or something new.

Then, what we're going to do, is to bury the gray papers in a little compost pile, where they can decompose. And then, we'll plant the green papers in this fertile soil, where they can nourish growing things.

So, take a few minutes now to write down on the gray paper one or more things you'd like to leave behind.

(When we're ready to place gray papers into individual cups containing a little of the compost)

May all these things which we are ready to leave behind, decompose and return to the earth.

(Have people get up and place their papers in a cup, then add more compost to cover them.)

You can take your compost home with you or I will take it home and add it to our compost pile.

Now, take a few minutes to write down on the green paper one or more things you want to bring into this year.

(When we're ready to place green papers into the fertile soil)

May all these things which we are ready to nurture, be as nourishment for new life which grows from the earth.

(Put a little soil into cups. Have people get up and place their papers in a cup, then add more soil to cover them.)

You can take your fertile soil home or if you leave it here, we will put it into our UUFP flower garden along the walkway out front.

(Pause)

May all our good intentions come to pass. May it be so.